

the world forgetting by the world forgot

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| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warnings: | Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings |
| Category: | Gen |
| Fandoms: | Minecraft (Video Game) , Dream SMP |
| Relationships: | Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit , Ranboo & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Ranboo & Toby Smith Tubbo , Wilbur Soot & TommyInnit , Clay Dream & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , No Romantic Relationship(s) |
| Characters: | TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Toby Smith Tubbo , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) |
| Additional Tags: | Alternate Universe - Superheroes/Superpowers , Dark Sleepy Bois Inc , Possessive Behavior , Sleepy Bois Inc as Family , Villain Sleepy Bois Inc (Video Blogging RPF) , Amnesia , Hurt/Comfort , TommyInnit Deserves Better (Video Blogging RPF) , Families of Choice , Complicated Relationships , Secret Identity , Identity Reveal , Kidnapping , Self-Discovery , Memory Loss , found family arc 2 electric boogaloo , Manipulation , everything is not what it seems , imagine that to the tune of the wizards of waverly place theme , btw the possessive tag is for dream not sbi , just wanna clarify that |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 1 of a spotless mind |
| Collections: | incomplete v good fics , Rebel's favorite fics!(smp) , SBI superheroes/powers au my beloved , Please PLEASE read these , minecraft fanfiction I stay up until 4 am reading and re-reading , Sbi bamf fics that just <3 (and some angst of course) , The best MCYT fics you've ever read , *consumes the angst* , Beloved minecraft fics with dark stuff , Sbi!! /pos , Amesfaves , Recsforlucifer , *slaps fic* this baby can hold so much trauma, Sam's Fic Recs , fics i eat for breakfast , mcyt wip fics that... , Heart eye emoji , Blobfish's favorite fics , Mmm yes angst do be tasty , mmm favs , cringe phase , ohh what's that? *trips and falls down the hole* , Fics I enjoy , Dsmp hero universe , things me read and luv , favorites , Books That I finished , Completed stories I've read , holygrailffics , DaisyMooonLovesThis , MMR , Fics that had me screaming into my hands , Sbi Fanfics that actually slap , Fics I've read , fuckin' amazing fics!!! , Forge's Screaming Extravaganza , sol's comfort fics , DizzyRose Vigilante/Villain fic , Found family to make me feel something , favourite books ive read on here , dsmp fics that made me cry |

at 3 am, SBI (an a lil crimeboys/bedrock bros shhhhh) completed fics,
Books to be binded, Saved the Best for Last, The Printing Press ↗,
Bang Bam Who Gave The Child Superpowers, and I will adore you
forevermore, SBI Superpower fics bc I have issues, six' favorite sbi
superpower aus, (six') legendary works, Crimeboys works that
emotionally destroy me, circus's fav dreamsmp fics ^^, All kinds of SBI
fics, fics that live up to mads' impossible standards, when insomnia hits,
Top Tier MCYT, Parsonsaj's Best of the Best of the Best, top tier
SBI/crimeboys fics that distract my from my homework

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by [bonesandthebees \(bonesandcacti\)](#).

Summary

*“Something has been stolen from us,” Thanatos said, his wings puffing up as he spoke.
“Something that is very important to us. And we are fairly certain that the person who stole
this thing of ours is in this very crowd.”*

*Dream tensed beside Tommy as the crowd broke out into murmurs. Eyes were darting
towards the different heroes in the crowd, the benefactors no doubt assuming that the culprit
had to be a hero.*

*“Like we said, we haven’t crashed your party to cause trouble. But we want this thing
returned to us, and we won’t hesitate to take extreme measures to get what we want.”*

or, Tommy was a lot of things: a newly debuted hero sidekick, an amnesiac, and a former kidnapping victim of the Syndicate.

Tommy didn't actually remember that last one though. That was just what Dream told him.

Only weeks after his hero debut, the Syndicate announces they are searching for something, and Tommy knows it has to be him. The scariest part? If they find him, Tommy will have no clue what to expect, because the Syndicate might know him, but he has no memories of them.

So he can't let them find him. No matter what.

Of course they end up finding him anyway.

Notes

hello everyone!! I bring you another superhero fic!!

if you're coming from my other fic, tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains, I want to make it clear, THIS IS NOT IN THE SAME UNIVERSE AS CLINIC! there might be similar names or powers, but it's a completely separate world from that fic. the tone is also going to be a bit darker than in the world of clinic, so please check the tags to stay safe!

but yes this is my next big project I'm going to work on after I complete clinic! for the moment I'm only posting the first chapter of this to build hype, but I won't be updating it again until clinic is complete, so make sure to subscribe to find out when I post the next chapter!

anyway I'm so hyped to finally be starting this, I've had this idea sitting in my google drive for MONTHS

hope you enjoy the first chapter!

- Translation into Русский available: [the world forgetting by the world forgot](#) (забыли мир, и миром позабыты) by [Tsu_01](#)

party crashers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

This was definitely the bougiest fucking party Tommy had ever been to. Or, well, at least the bougiest party he could *remember* going to.

Men and women in expensive clothes milled about, crystalline champagne glasses glittering in their hands like the stars above their heads. The night air was cool, but not unpleasantly so, although Tommy was still grateful for the suit jacket keeping him warm.

It was the only reason he was glad to be wearing the suit though. Otherwise it itched like hell, with the collar digging into his neck no matter how many times he pulled it away from his skin. Dream had told him he had to wear it since this was a formal event, even though Tommy was a superhero now and *he* thought he should be allowed to wear his normal superhero outfit here considering it was literally a fundraiser for the Hero Committee.

But no. He had to be in formalwear despite how stupid he felt in the suit.

And okay, maybe he wasn't technically a hero himself. Hell, it had only been a few weeks since he'd made his first public debut as Dream's sidekick. After training him to hell and back for a month straight, Dream had finally deemed him ready. So less than three weeks ago he'd gone out on his first patrol with his mentor, and the city was still figuring out how it felt about Dream's new sidekick—Lucid, who wore a frowny face mask to contrast Dream's smiley face.

So it wasn't like he was really in a position to make complaints. But still, that was all the more reason to let him off the hook with this.

It was a stupid argument that he wasn't going to win. He knew that. But at least he got to keep his mask on so no one could see the way he was scowling at every person who tried to talk to him.

The crowd was a mix of masked and unmasked people. The unmasked were the rich families in the city who poured heaping sums of money into helping the government fund the Hero Committee. The masked were the heroes themselves, thanking the benefactors and listening to their ideas for improving the way they did their jobs. Not like Tommy would actually bother listening to some rich pricks who just wanted to ask heroes if they could 'do something' about the homeless problem in L'Manberg. Like they didn't have enough money to fund more homeless shelters themselves. Fucking assholes.

Tommy was hanging towards the edge of the crowd, looking over the railing of the rooftop and at the glittering skyline that stretched out onto the horizon. His hair was ruffled by the breeze, and he sucked in a breath of cool air, trying to rid the fog covering his thoughts that had settled in his mind from being stuck in the crowd for so long.

Suddenly, there was a hand on his shoulder.

“Lucid?”

Biting back a sigh at the older woman’s crooning voice, Tommy turned around to face her, somewhat glad that his frowny face mask was matching the frown he was wearing underneath.

“Yes? Did you need something, ma’am?” He asked, trying to inject as much fake politeness in his tone as possible.

“I’m so glad I caught you. I wanted to ask if you and Dream are aware of the uptick we’ve had in, well, unpleasant people showing up in Prime Heights?” The woman asked, raising a perfectly plucked brow at him. “We live in Prime Heights because it’s the safest part of the city, but there’s just been an increase lately in people who just... don’t look as though they belong, and it makes me nervous.”

Great. One of the most annoying kinds of rich people at this party. The ones who not only complained about the work the heroes did like they were baristas at a coffee shop who didn’t make her order right, but who managed to be super damn offensive at the same time too.

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but a familiar presence materialized beside him before he could.

“Of course we’re aware of that, ma’am,” Dream said with honey-laced words, the smile audible in his voice. “We’re doing everything in our power to keep our benefactors safe. I can assure you that we’ll look into improving the situation in Prime Heights.”

The woman’s pursed lips instantly smoothed out into a warm smile. Dream tended to have that effect on people. He could calm even the angriest of people by saying what they wanted to hear. There was something about the permanent smile mask he wore that just settled the worries of anyone talking to him. You’d almost think his powers included charm speak, but that wasn’t the case. It was just the way Dream was.

“Thank you so much, Dream. We really appreciate everything you do for the community,” the woman crooned, patting his arm before she hurried back into the crowd.

Once she had disappeared, Dream leaned down to Tommy’s ear. “I understand it can be frustrating to talk to them, but you have to at least try to pretend you appreciate the fact that they’re paying your salary,” he whispered, squeezing Tommy’s shoulder in a not so gentle way.

“Sorry, I’m just not used to having to be all polite and shit. Especially to stuck up assholes like this,” Tommy whispered back.

“Well get used to it. This is your first non-hero related appearance by my side, and if the benefactors decide they don’t like you, you could get kicked out,” Dream told him, his gaze boring into Tommy behind his mask as he straightened back up. He kept his hand on

Tommy's shoulder and turned him back towards the crowd. "You gotta try and make a good impression on at least some of the people here, so just stick by me and follow my lead."

Biting back his protests because he knew Dream was right, Tommy groaned and followed his mentor back into the throng.

A few minutes later, Tommy found himself stuck in a conversation with an older couple decked out in gold and silk, and Tommy was once again so glad his mask covered his entire face or else he'd be getting yelled at by Dream for all the eye rolling he'd done since this conversation began.

"Dream, Lucid, have either of you been to South End very much? Although we tend to stay in Prime Heights ourselves, South End has some fantastic restaurants down by the docks," the man asked, glancing eagerly between the two of them.

While Tommy was tempted to snap that eating from a fancy restaurant like the ones in South End was something he'd never been able to afford for most of his life, something in the back of his head made him pause. No, he hadn't been to any of those expensive seafood restaurants down by the docks, he knew that. But while he couldn't remember spending much time in South End at all, the place felt familiar, even though he couldn't recall any specific memories of the place.

Frowning, he tried to shuffle through what he remembered of South End, but groaned when he could only think of a few vague memories of crossing over into the district to go shopping with a foster family when he was much younger. But he knew that wasn't what was nagging the back of his mind.

It was the stupid wall of void in his memories again. The last year of his life that was wiped clean from his mind like wiping chalk off a chalkboard. He had been to South End in that year, he could *feel* it. If he focused hard enough, he thought he could still taste the salt on his tongue and hear the blasts of the ship's horns. But he couldn't remember when, how, or who he'd been with at the time. It was empty, and despite his fists pounding against the wall in his mind, nothing could seem to tear the blockade down.

Dream seemed to notice Tommy's frustration because he put his hand on his shoulder again, squeezing it much more gently this time as a reassurance. He knew what it meant. It was Dream's way of telling him, *it's alright. Focus on my hand. Focus on the here and now.*

Tommy focused on the pressure, taking a few deep breaths to drag himself back to the present. The man was still going on about the seafood in South End, and Tommy tried to distract himself by figuring out how the hell he was going to contribute to this conversation.

He opened his mouth, ready to make some comment about how the idea of eating lobster made him sad because *their little faces were so cute*, but he was cut off by a piercing scream echoing across the rooftop.

The crowd went dead silent, every hero in the vicinity whipping their head towards the source of the noise. At one end of the roof, a stage had been set up for Mayor Schlatt to give a thank you speech to both the heroes and benefactors at the end of the night. But instead of

Mayor Schlatt or one of the event organizers standing on that stage, there were three figures that were familiar to anyone who lived in L'Manberg—and not in a good way.

Tommy's heart dropped into his stomach as his eyes landed on the three leaders of the Syndicate. The most powerful and terrifying supervillains in all of L'Manberg.

Thanatos, Orpheus, and Acheron.

Thanatos stood in the center of the stage, his black talons wrapped around the microphone while his pitch black wings spread out behind him. His face was completely shrouded by the dark, glittering veil that covered his head, but even from his place in the crowd, Tommy could *feel* his smirk.

To Thanatos' right stood Acheron. His bright pink hair was done up in its usual complicated criss-cross of braids, half-hidden underneath the jagged boar skull he used to cover his face. His eyes were glowing bright red, and Tommy could see two long swords hidden under his pitch black cape.

Then, to Thanatos' left stood the last leader of the Syndicate—Orpheus. The porcelain opera mask he used to cover his face was oddly appropriate for the setting, and the lights pointed towards the stage highlighted the dark glittering makeup he always had applied under his eyes. His black trench coat billowed softly in the breeze that pushed through the roof, and Tommy noticed that the villain had even switched out his usual heavy boots for proper dress shoes that had been perfectly polished, as if he had wanted to match the formal evening looks present tonight. Jesus christ, he was such a dramatic bitch.

Thanatos tapped the mic a few times as heroes sprinted towards the stage, a soft thumping echoing over the crowd with the sound. Taking that as his cue to move as well, Tommy started trying to weave between the expensively-dressed people, but it was a slow effort given how all of them were frozen with fear as they stared at Thanatos.

"Hello? Is this thing on?" Thanatos asked in an almost mocking tone.

"Don't move, Thanatos!" One hero—Hourglass it seemed—shouted as he pushed through the crowd, having gotten much closer to the front than Tommy currently was.

Thanatos laughed, and the chilling sound reverberated off the walls.

"I don't plan on going anywhere just yet. But you might want to think twice before you consider attacking us," Thanatos grinned, glancing to his left.

Tommy's eyes widened as Orpheus' smirking figure faded from view, turning incorporeal before going invisible completely. There were a few seconds of silence as everyone's heads whipped around, trying to find the ghost-like villain, when there was the sound of shouting coming from the right side of the stage.

Schlatt had been circled by guards the moment the Syndicate leaders had made themselves known, his security detail shoving him to the side and surrounding him to make sure the mayor wasn't a target. But now, Tommy could see one of the guard's eyes had gone milky

white, and he had one arm wrapped around Schlatt's neck to hold him in a headlock, with the other pressing the barrel of his gun to the Mayor's head.

"Hey! What the hell, man?!" Schlatt shouted, although he didn't dare move with the gun pressed to his temple.

"As you all can see, Orpheus has possessed the Mayor's security guard, and he won't have any problem pulling the trigger if you make any moves against us right now," Thanatos explained, as if he were teaching a presentation instead of holding the Mayor hostage.

All of the heroes in the crowd immediately stopped running, including Tommy. Next to him, he felt Dream place a hand on his shoulder,

"Don't make any moves until I tell you to," Dream whispered into his ear.

Tommy nodded, knowing this wasn't the time to question his mentor in any way shape or form. So instead of pushing forward like he wanted to, he just turned his gaze back to the stage.

"We're not here to cause trouble. We simply have an announcement we would like to make and then we'll be on our way," Thanatos told the crowd while Acheron stood silent at his side like a sentinel. Taking another beat, Tommy gave Dream an uncertain look, and his mentor shook his head. He still shouldn't try to make a move.

"Something has been stolen from us," Thanatos said, his wings puffing up as he spoke. "Something that is *very* important to us. And we are fairly certain that the person who stole this thing of ours is in this very crowd."

Dream tensed beside Tommy as the crowd broke out into murmurs. Eyes were darting towards the different heroes in the crowd, the benefactors no doubt assuming that the culprit had to be a hero.

"Like we said, we haven't crashed your party to cause trouble. But we want this thing returned to us, and we won't hesitate to take extreme measures to get what we want."

Schlatt yelped again as Orpheus—still possessing the guard—pressed the gun harder against his head. A clear threat.

There was a heavy silence that fell over the crowd. Uncomfortable glances were shared. Everyone had the same silent question on their minds.

"What is this thing they stole?" One of the benefactors suddenly shouted from the crowd, his voice shaky. "If we know what it is, maybe we can help you find it!"

Thanatos chuckled, and it was a dark sound that made chills run down Tommy's spine. "We'd prefer not to reveal that information. The thief knows what they took, and they know why we want it back. They're the only person I'm addressing here tonight." Even though the veil blocked Thanatos' eyes, for some reason, Tommy could tell Thanatos was looking in Dream's direction.

Tommy glanced up at his mentor, and paused when he noticed something odd.

There was a strange shimmer over Dream's mask. In fact, when Tommy's gaze lowered, he realized that the shimmer was covering Dream's *entire* body. It was so subtle, it was only noticeable to those who had it pointed out to them. But Tommy was quite familiar with Dream's powers at this point, and he immediately understood what Dream was doing.

Just as the realization hit Tommy, he heard a yelp come from the mayor's direction. The Dream standing behind him dematerialized as the real Dream darted over to Schlatt's side, shoving the guard Orpheus had possessed away from Schlatt.

And just like that, everything fell into chaos.

Schlatt stumbled out of Orpheus' grip, his guards grabbing him and yanking him away from the stage as quickly as possible. Tommy—and the rest of the heroes—resumed weaving through the crowd, the civilians now screaming and running in a panic. Tommy could barely see above the throng, but he was just able to make out Dream fighting the guard Orpheus had possessed in hand to hand combat, while Thanatos and Acheron made their way towards Tommy's mentor.

Shit. Tommy's hands may have been shaking with the idea of confronting a member of the Syndicate head on, but he couldn't let them get to Dream.

Surging forward, Tommy pulled out the collapsible baton on his belt and lunged for Acheron. Maybe it was a bit stupid to go for the guy who literally could *die and come back to life*, but he just happened to be the one closest to him.

Acheron jumped back when Tommy swung the baton his way. He dodged Tommy's swings easily, almost looking bored as he reached for his own twin swords.

One sword came in from the left, and Tommy yelped as he swung his baton up to block it. Then, the other moved towards him, and Tommy twisted his baton sideways so it was blocking both the weapons.

Spinning his baton and jumping out of the way of the swords, he and Acheron began something of a dance. Acheron would swing for him and Tommy would just barely dodge, and then Tommy would try to lunge forward only to get his baton batted away like a fly by Acheron's swords.

Every time his baton met one of the sides of Acheron's swords, pain would flash through his arms. Acheron hit *hard*.

"Lucid! Behind you!" Dream suddenly shouted from behind.

Recognizing the command, Tommy dropped to the ground as Dream barreled towards Acheron. Predictably, Acheron swung both his swords Dream's way, and Tommy almost laughed at the shock on his face when the swords passed through Dream's illusion like smoke.

Using the moment of distraction as the illusion faded away, Tommy leapt at Acheron again, and this time actually managed to land a hit against his gut. Acheron grunted and took a step back, but it was only half a second before Tommy had to bring his baton back above his head to keep his throat from getting slit.

Acheron pressed down harder on the baton with his swords. Hot, searing pain screamed through Tommy's muscles as his arms began to shake. It was like he was being crushed by a hydraulic press. Acheron wasn't just strong, he was *insanely* strong.

Biting back a whimper, Tommy was forced to stumble back against a wall, clenching his jaw as he fought to keep the swords away from him.

"I haven't seen you before," Acheron commented, barely even sounding out of breath. "You a Dream wannabe or somethin'?"

"I'm his sidekick," Tommy forced out between gritted teeth. His heart was pounding out of his ears because he was actually *talking* to Acheron, but he trusted his voice changer would keep the man from recognizing him. "My name is Lucid."

Acheron snorted, and leaned in further. This time, Tommy did whimper as his shoulders started to tremble against the weight. "Lucid, huh? What are your powers anyway?"

"Like I'd fucking tell you!" Tommy hissed.

It wasn't that Tommy was powerless. He *did* have powers. It's just that they were completely useless when it came to actual combat situations. But it's not like he wanted Acheron to know that.

"Well, let's see if we can find out," Acheron snickered.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, mentally preparing to hear the snapping of his own bones if the pressure on his baton got any worse.

But before Acheron could do anything, another voice shouted from behind.

"ACHERON!" Thanatos yelled, his powerful wings already lifting him off the stage.
"WE'RE LEAVING!"

Acheron huffed, and suddenly all the weight on the baton was released. Tommy's arms fell limp to his sides in relief, and it took all his energy not to collapse on the floor right then and there.

"Guess we'll save this for another time. See you around, *Lucid*," Acheron said, something mocking wrapping around his voice when he said Tommy's name.

Looking back to the stage, Tommy watched as Thanatos swooped forward, picking Acheron up by the arm and flying off the roof and back into the city. A bit behind him, Tommy noticed the see-through Orpheus—having left the guard's body—floating behind the winged man, albeit at a slightly slower speed.

Within seconds, the trio had disappeared into the city skyline, leaving the heroes watching them from the rooftop with dumbstruck expressions.

Suffice to say, the party was ruined.



After the villains had fled the party, the heroes tried their best to do damage control with the guests who had run and hid in the stairwell of the building. Naturally, there were a lot of incredulous demands of “how could you let this happen?!?” and “are we going to try and find what was taken from them?”

As the Number One Hero, it was Dream’s job to try and assuage these fears. He reassured the guests this was something completely unprecedented, and they would be taking steps to prevent an incident like this at future events for the Hero Committee. While this was enough to placate the guests, Tommy could tell by the numerous scowls that they were going to be dealing with complaints for a while.

Once all the guests had left, Dream told the heroes at the scene that they would have a meeting on this incident the next night. In the meantime though, everyone needed to go home and rest up, and be on the lookout for any more activity from the Syndicate.

Now, it was several hours later, and Tommy was back at Dream’s apartment. Well, it was technically *their* apartment, but Tommy didn’t pay any kind of rent. Dream was just letting him stay there out of pure generosity, so Tommy tended to call it Dream’s apartment anyway.

He had taken a shower as soon as they got back, the muscles in his arms screaming for something to lessen the ache. The hot water had done wonders, easing the tension in his shoulders that had sat there ever since the Syndicate first showed up to the party, and soothing the aches that he knew would only be ten times worse tomorrow.

Stepping out of the bathroom, Tommy dropped his towel in the laundry basket, shoving his hands in his sweatpants pockets as he wandered back towards the living room.

The apartment itself was one of the nicest places Tommy had ever been in. It was at the top of the Hero Tower, with floor to ceiling windows looking out over the entire city. There was a large, open living room, a very modern-looking kitchen, and three bedrooms—one for Dream, one for Tommy, and a guest room.

Trailing his hand along the granite countertop of the kitchen, Tommy spotted Dream sitting on the couch, news blaring across the TV screen in front of him. The light of the TV gave the room an eerie, white glow, because Dream hadn’t turned on any other lights in the house.

“What are they saying?” Tommy asked as he moved past the kitchen and into the living room itself, his bare feet moving off the cold wood and onto plush carpet.

Dream had changed out of his hero costume and into sweats, but still kept his mask on. There was a part of Tommy that was hurt by Dream still not trusting him enough to show him his face, but he knew that considering his situation, it was probably for the best.

“It’s unsurprising, but they’re making it all about the benefactors,” Dream told him, the sneer audible in his voice. “Talking about how they barely made it out with their lives. Totally ignoring the fact that the only one who got threatened was Schlatt.”

Tommy rolled his eyes as he dropped onto the couch next to Dream. “Fucking typical. Did they mention what the Syndicate said about something being stolen from them?”

Dream shook his head. “No. The Committee sent me an email saying they don’t want that to be public information, and that the benefactors have already been told to stay quiet about it.”

“Why?” Tommy frowned.

“Well, if the Syndicate starts making more moves to try and demand this thing be given back to them, if the public was aware they were looking for something, they would be asking us as heroes to give into their demands. Obviously, we can’t do that, so it’s to keep public pressure off of us,” Dream explained, running a hand through his hair.

“But if the Syndicate starts pulling shit with the public, like taking hostages or something, isn’t that a little unfair for the public not to know why?” Tommy asked.

At this, Dream turned to look at Tommy for the first time since he sat down, and Tommy squirmed under the blank stare of his dotted eyes. “Unfair? Maybe. But if it prevents mass hysteria then I say it’s worth it,” Dream told him. “As heroes, our job is to protect the public from threats they’re not even aware of. The average citizen doesn’t need the burden of knowing just how in danger they really are on a day to day basis. If everyone realized just how powerful these villains were, life would come grinding to a halt because everyone would be too scared to do anything.”

“But-”

“Tommy,” Dream cut him off before he could even start his protest. “Ignorance is a blessing, not a curse.”

Tommy thought back to the black void in his memories. The year of his life he was missing. His frown deepened.

“Not being able to remember the last fucking year of my life sure doesn’t feel like a blessing,” Tommy snapped.

“Are you sure about that, Tommy?” Dream asked, cocking his head to the side. “You *really* want to remember what happened to you when you were kidnapped by the Syndicate?” When Tommy was silent, Dream continued. “I have no idea what happened to you while you were being held captive, but from what we know about the Syndicate, I highly doubt it was anything nice. You’re probably being saved from so much trauma because of your amnesia.”

Flinching, Tommy dropped his eyes to his lap. “But... I feel like I would *know* if anything really bad happened to me. Like, I doubt I could just forget that all so easily.”

“Or maybe your brain is trying to protect you by blocking out your memories,” Dream pointed out, reaching forward to tap Tommy’s forehead. “You keep trying to unlock these memories thinking they’re going to give you answers, but haven’t you considered that you don’t need these answers?”

Tommy smacked Dream’s hand away from his face. “But what if someone’s looking for me? The last thing I remember, I had just turned sixteen and I was fucking homeless. I lived in a warehouse that had holes in the roof and smelled like mold, and I was lucky if I got to eat once a day. Did I look homeless to you when you found me?”

“I found you tied up in a warehouse with the Syndicate watching you like hawks. They could’ve had you in captivity for months, and they probably fed you more than what you got on the streets. That doesn’t mean they were being kind to you though,” Dream pointed out.

“I wasn’t saying that!” Tommy snapped again, narrowing his eyes at Dream. “I’m not trying to say the Syndicate were all wonderful and lovely to me because that’s fucking ridiculous. But I’m saying I just-” He paused, unsure of how to put into words all the thoughts and wisps of memories floating in his mind.

“Go on,” Dream pushed after a few beats. “You’re saying you just...?”

In truth, Tommy wasn’t sure what he was trying to say. There was nothing he remembered, but there were wisps that would float at the edges of his mind, just out of reach. It was like when you woke up from a dream, and you knew that your mind had just been filled with vivid images moments ago, but anytime you tried to remember it the picture dissipated into smoke. The feelings and sensations would sit on the edge of your thoughts, but couldn’t ever be brought into focus.

Tommy had those same dream-like wisps of memories. The whisper of a kind voice. The ghost of a hand running through his hair. He knew deep down in his bones that in that year he lost, *someone* had loved him. Someone had taken him off the streets, gave him food, and cleaned him up. But anytime he tried to bring the memory of that person into focus, it would all disappear.

“There should be someone looking for me,” Tommy admitted, keeping his head down. “I just- I don’t know how I know, but I got off the streets in that year. I think someone took me in, and if they did then that means they should be searching for me right now.”

“Tommy,” Dream said, his voice much softer than it had been before. “I told you I’m keeping an eye on missing person’s reports, but no one has reported you missing. You’ve been with me for almost three months now. The only people that could possibly be looking for you would be the Syndicate.”

Gritting his teeth, Tommy winced. He knew Dream was right. It was stupid to get his hopes up when he knew that if anyone was looking for him, they would’ve filed something with the police by now.

However, what Dream said brought another question into his mind.

"Um, so today then, when Thanatos said they were looking for something, do you think they meant—"

"You?" Dream finished for him. Tommy nodded. "I think it's possible, but I'm not sure."

"If it is me, I just don't understand why they'd want me back so badly," Tommy said, wringing his hands in his lap. "They've held hostages plenty of times. Why the hell would they want me back badly enough to crash a fundraiser party full of heroes?"

There was a moment of silence. Glancing up from his lap, Tommy saw the reflection of the TV lights dancing across the surface of Dream's porcelain mask. It seemed like the news had changed to a different story now, but the volume was down so Tommy couldn't hear it.

"Do you really need me to tell you the answer to that?" Dream finally said, the black dot eyes of his mask boring into him again.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, biting back a sigh. Dream was right. Tommy knew the answer to that question. He just didn't want it to be the truth.

"So they knew about my powers then," Tommy muttered, dropping his gaze to his hands.

"They probably did, and that's probably why they kept you around. You were likely their personal healer. That's a valuable thing to have, especially when you get into fights as often as the Syndicate does," Dream explained.

Seeing Tommy's tense expression, Dream then reached forward again, and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, it's okay," he reassured Tommy, his voice low. "As long as you do as I say, they won't find you again."

"What if they see me healing you as Lucid though?" Tommy asked, struggling to keep the tremor out of his voice. "Won't they know it's me?"

Dream snorted and shook his head. "Healing isn't *that* rare of a power to have. I doubt they'd see you healing me and automatically assume it's you under the mask."

"But they want a healer, right? So what if they find out Lucid is a healer and decide to just take me without even realizing who I am?" Tommy pushed, all these different scenarios spinning around his head.

"I don't think that'll happen. They want their healer Tommy because they're familiar with him. They know his strengths and limits, and they likely knew how to make him do what they wanted. To them, Lucid is a complete stranger. They have no idea how powerful your healing abilities are, and they would have to start from square one to get you to work with them, which would be even harder than it was the first time because you're a hero now, not a civilian. I doubt they would think it's worth the effort," Dream reassured him, squeezing his shoulder. "Besides, every time you're out as Lucid, I'm right there by your side. And I'm not going to let you get taken by them again."

Taking a shaky breath, Tommy nodded. “Do you promise?” He asked, wincing when his voice cracked.

Suddenly, Dream was leaning forward, tugging him into a hug. Tommy melted into Dream’s hold, burying his face in his mentor’s shoulder.

“I promise I’m not going to let them get you again,” Dream whispered, hugging him tight. “You’re *mine* now. My sidekick. Not theirs.”

Tommy nodded, breathing in the familiar fabric softener smell on Dream’s sweatshirt. “I’m yours.”

“You’re mine,” Dream repeated. “You don’t belong to the Syndicate anymore, and you never will again.” He pulled back from the hug suddenly, and Tommy missed the comfort the touch brought.

“Thank you, Dream,” Tommy muttered.

“You’re welcome, Tommy,” Dream said, ruffling Tommy’s hair as he pushed to his feet. “I think I’m gonna call it an early night. If you need those sleeping pills again, they’re in the same drawer in the kitchen as always.”

“Alright, night then,” Tommy nodded.

“See you in the morning,” Dream waved, the wooden planks creaking underneath his feet.

Tommy watched as Dream disappeared into the hallway behind the kitchen, before slumping back into the couch. The TV was onto reporting the weather for the next week, and Tommy’s eyes glazed over as he stared at the woman pointing at a satellite map with her hand.

The Syndicate was looking for him. Although he didn’t remember it, they had kidnapped him before, and likely forced him to work as their healer. If they knew he was Lucid, they would snatch him up in two seconds flat.

But Dream promised that wouldn’t happen. And Tommy trusted Dream completely. Dream was his mentor, his best friend, his *savior*.

So Tommy pushed his worries as far down as he could. It would be okay.

He just had to make sure the Syndicate never found out who he was.

Chapter End Notes

PEOPLE PLEASE READ THIS every time a new hero/villain gets mentioned in a chapter, I'm going to include something here in the author's notes saying who they are

unless I don't want the reader to know their identity. so if I don't explain who someone is, that's intentional.

anyway, besides the obvious, in this chapter we mention hourglass - karl, thanatos - phil, acheron - techno, orpheus - wilbur

we'll be seeing a lot more characters pretty soon! I'm so hyped to finally be able to start posting this, but again I won't be updating until my other fic, tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains, is complete.

please leave a comment if you enjoyed!! it motivates me so much to keep going, I don't reply to most of them but they seriously make my day

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

pain

Chapter Summary

In the wake of their threat, the Syndicate starts to make moves.

Chapter Notes

okay i know i said i wasn't going to update this until clinic is finished but I just got so excited that I ended up finishing chapter 2 and figured okay why not post it

anyway thank you all so much for all the love you've already given this and we only have ONE chapter out. like with a single chapter out we already have over 10k hits and that's insane!!

I really hope you guys enjoy this chapter, we get to meet more villains and more heroes, and have a hell of a lot of action going on

TWs: lots of violence, mention of torture, choking

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Syndicate was quiet immediately after the party.

The Hero Committee was on high alert. They kept an eye out for any sign of Syndicate activity, waiting to see when they would make good on their threats of taking 'extreme measures' to get what they wanted.

At first, it was a relief when they didn't act immediately. Then, it was terrifying, because everyone was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

But after a week of baited breath, they finally heard something.

Circe and Moros—two members of the Syndicate that were regarded as being highly dangerous. They weren't as much of a high level threat as the three leaders, but they were close to it. The two of them had reportedly broken into the chief of police's home, and were currently holding him hostage. Their motives were unknown, which meant they could kill the chief if they wanted to.

Dream and Lucid were out the door within minutes of getting the alert.

The Chief of Police lived in a home much larger than what Tommy was expecting. It was in Prime Heights of all places, and although it wasn't the biggest mansion in the area, it was still a pretty damn nice house. Certainly nicer than what a government worker should be able to afford.

Police cars littered the street outside the Chief's house, the flashing red and blue lights reflecting off the asphalt that was still damp from the rain earlier that night. Officers were pacing anxiously, and a few seemed to slump in relief when Tommy and Dream rushed towards the front.

"Dream! You're here, oh thank god," one of the officers said as he ran up to them. "We have no idea what they're doing to him in there, but we heard screaming earlier—"

"Don't worry, we'll handle this," Dream said, holding a hand up to stop the officer's rambling. "I want you to be ready to call in either Hellion or Cordyceps for backup if it sounds like things are going wrong in there. Got it?"

"I'll be waiting, sir," the officer confirmed.

Nodding, Dream gestured for Tommy to follow him, and the two crossed the street to the property itself, their boots clacking against the stone pathway that led to the main entrance. From here, Tommy could see that the front door was slightly ajar, and he could faintly hear voices coming from inside.

Holding up a finger, Dream crept to the door, with Tommy hanging back by a few feet. Focusing on the voices, Tommy tried to make out what they were saying.

"I'm telling you, we don't keep a photo record of the homeless that move through the shelters!" A man that Tommy guessed was the chief was saying, his voice tinged with panic.

"But they ask for ID's, don't they?" A woman—Circe, judging by her accent—asked the chief.

"If they're a long-term resident at the shelter then they need an ID, but if they're just staying for the night they don't need to show that," the chief explained. "Please, I'm telling you, even if they do ID someone, the record keeping is so shitty, there's pretty much no chance you'll find the person you're looking for there."

"You sure about that?" Another man, Moros probably, spoke up. "Because all we want to know is if you've seen one person. This can all be over if you just give us what we want."

"I'm not lying! I don't give a shit about who you're after, but I can't help you!"

There was a beat of silence, and Dream beckoned for Tommy to come closer. Keeping his footsteps as light as possible, Tommy crept behind Dream, looking over his shoulder to spy into the living room.

The police chief was tied to a chair in the center of the room. His tie was askew, and his eyes were wild as they darted between the villains. Circe stood on the chief's left, wearing a black

masquerade mask that covered the upper half of her face, decorated with wilting flowers and spiked tree branches growing out from the left side of it. Moros stood on the right, his skull mask covering everything but his mouth, with black makeup painting the visible skin around his eyes.

“Fine, guess we’re going back to the hard way,” Moros said.

“No! Please, don’t use your power on me again, I’m begging—”

And just like that, Dream kicked open the door, but instead of rushing into the living room like Tommy thought, Dream immediately yanked him behind the stairs. Tommy watched as an illusion copy of Dream ran into the living room, his form faintly shimmering as the fake Dream confronted the two villains.

“Stop this right now,” the fake Dream told them. “Let the police chief go, and I won’t hurt you guys too badly.”

Holding a finger up to his lips, the real Dream guided Tommy around the stairs and through the kitchen of the house. There was a second way into the living room through there, and the duo hid behind the wall of the archway where they could see the back of Circe’s head as she focused on the fake Dream.

“Dream, we were wondering when you’d show up,” Circe said, her blossom pink hair swishing around her face as she spoke. “Where’s your little sidekick? Did Acheron hit him a bit too hard back at the benefit party?”

Tommy grit his teeth at the mocking in her tone, but Dream placed a hand on his shoulder as a silent warning. He had to stay quiet.

“He stayed behind because he’s still recovering,” the fake Dream lied. “But it’s not like I’ll have any trouble taking you two down on my own.”

The real Dream held up a finger, telling Tommy they were about to make their move. He pointed to himself, and then to Circe, and it wasn’t hard for Tommy to figure out that Dream was going to take Circe on while he needed to deal with Moros.

Tommy nodded and gave him a thumbs up. Dream seemed pleased as he glanced back to the living room.

Circe and Moros both laughed at this. “Bold words, but how confident are you in that?” Circe asked, holding a hand up towards the illusion.

“Pretty damn confident,” the real Dream then said, jumping out from behind the wall and launching himself at Circe.

And just like that, the fight was on.

Circe whipped around as the illusion turned to smoke, holding her hands out towards the real Dream. He knocked her back before she could use her powers on him though, and she

stumbled backwards as Dream made three copies of himself, the illusions all spreading around her in a circle.

Trusting that Dream had Circe handled, Tommy turned his attention to Moros.

Moros hadn't made any moves towards him. He stood stockstill in front of the chair the chief was still sitting in, watching Tommy intensely.

Tommy dropped his gaze away from Moros' face. Dream had drilled it into his mind that if he ever fought Moros, he was *never* to look into the villain's eyes.

"What? Am I that ugly of a bloke you won't even look at me?" Moros taunted, taking a step towards him. "Your name is Lucid, right? Dream's shiny new sidekick who just popped up out of nowhere one day."

Tommy grit his teeth as he kept his eyes on Moros' chest, placing his hand on the baton on his hip. "Yup, that's me."

"What is it that you can do, *Lucid*?" Moros asked, taking another step. "Dream wouldn't choose just anyone as his sidekick. You gotta be able to do something real special if you get to play hero with him."

From the left, Tommy heard Dream cry out, and whipped his head over to try and get a look at what was going on.

But before he could, Moros took the opportunity and rushed him. Moros slammed him against the wall, and Tommy winced as a picture frame dug into his back.

"I may not be able to see your face, but I can sense your eyes behind that frowning mask you have," Moros hissed, pressing him harder against the wall. "You're trying to be brave, but you're scared of me, aren't you? That's why you won't look at me, you fucking bastard."

Clenching his jaw, Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as Moros' face took up his whole vision.

"Look at me, Lucid," Moros ordered.

Keeping his eyes shut, Tommy shook his head.

"LOOK AT ME!" Moros yelled, grabbing his shoulders and slamming him into the wall again.

Tommy heard the glass picture frame crack, and he gasped in pain when he felt a shard of glass cut through his jacket. In that split second, as the shock and surprise washed over him, Tommy's eyes flickered open on instinct.

He was immediately met with a pair of eyes staring at him. One the same dark blue as the deepest part of the ocean, and the other as bright red as fresh blood.

Moros smiled.

“That was easy, now wasn’t it?” Moros taunted.

And then, the pain hit.

The scream Tommy let out was borderline demonic as Moros’ powers went into effect. The villain let go of Tommy and he dropped to the floor like a ragdoll, yelling and crying as fire began to race through his veins.

Dream had tried to describe what Moros’ powers felt like to Tommy once before. How he could make you feel a pain that was like you were being burned from the inside out. How he didn’t even have to lay a finger on you, and you would want to spill all of your secrets in seconds just to get the flames in your chest to stop burning you.

Tommy had thought he knew what to expect, but he was wrong. It was so much worse than anything he could’ve imagined.

“FUCK!” Tommy shrieked as he writhed against the pain, feeling as though flames were licking every inch of his body.

“You know what Dream took from the Syndicate, don’t you?” Moros questioned, standing above him.

There was another yell on his left, and through the pain Tommy forced himself to turn his head to look. He saw that all the illusions of Dream had disappeared, leaving only the real Dream standing completely still while Circe held a hand out towards him. *Shit*. She was using her blood manipulation on him.

Moros’ power was scary because it was painful. Circe’s power was *terrifying* because she could turn anyone into her own personal puppet by literally controlling the blood in their body.

“Lucid!” Moros snapped, getting Tommy’s attention again. “If you keep ignoring me I’m just gonna make it hurt worse.”

“S-Sorry,” Tommy gasped out, still whimpering as the flames continued to rush through his body.

“I can’t even get someone to pay attention to me when I’m torturing them,” Moros muttered, shaking his head. “ Fucking unbelievable.”

“Please,” Tommy gasped, the flames reaching his chest and making his lungs scream. “Make it stop.”

“Then answer my question,” Moros pushed, staring down at him again. “You know what we want, and you know where Dream is keeping it, don’t you?”

It was him. They had to be looking for him. Circe and Moros had been asking the chief about homeless shelters, so they must’ve been thinking Tommy had escaped and was living on the streets again. It was the only thing that made sense.

Tommy knew that if the Syndicate found him again, it'd be all over. But as the pain grew stronger and tears poured down his cheeks, he wondered if he should just give it up. Just for the hope that the pain would stop. Anything was better than this. Even being kidnapped by the Syndicate.

"I—"

"SHIT!" Circe yelled, cutting Tommy off before he could give it up. Moros' attention immediately snapped towards his partner, and the flames inside of him died out almost as soon as they had started.

Looking again towards Circe, Tommy saw that Dream had managed to break out of her control and had her pinned to a wall, her hands pressed behind her back so she couldn't use her powers again. Circe was grunting and trying to get him off of her, but he was stronger than she was.

"Moros! Get him off of me!" Circe yelled.

Tommy forgotten, Moros jumped into action, leaping towards Dream to try and get him off of Circe. Dream shoved Circe to the ground and moved to defend himself, another group of fake Dream's appearing around him as they all ran in different directions, to try and confuse Moros as to which one was the real Dream.

Although his limbs ached as the remnants of Moros' power wore off, Tommy saw how Circe was stumbling to her feet, ready to puppet Dream once again.

Gritting his teeth, Tommy jumped up and ran between the illusions, going straight for Circe. She was so distracted trying to figure out which one was the real Dream, that she didn't see Tommy until he was right in front of her, and she barely had time to put her hands up before he was tackling her to the ground.

Pinning her arms to the ground by grabbing her wrists, Tommy knelt over the villain, meeting her sharp grey eyes and almost wincing at the rage in them. Her lips were twisted into a scowl, and she fought to try and get out of his grip.

"You little shit!" She hissed, glaring at him. "If you don't let go of me right now, you're going to regret it."

Tommy scoffed, pretending to be less terrified than he was. "And do what? Can't manipulate my blood if you can't use your hands."

At that, Circe stopped struggling. "Is that what you think?" She asked, her tone sharp and mocking.

She narrowed her eyes behind her mask, and slowly, Tommy began to feel a pressure around his neck. It was subtle at first, but within seconds his breathing started to stutter. It felt like there wasn't enough air in his lungs, and as the seconds ticked on, his throat closed further and further.

"I don't need my hands to block off the blood vessels in your throat," Circe taunted below him, a dangerous smirk flashing over her face. "I could close your carotid arteries right now and you'd be on the floor in seconds. The only reason I'm not doing that is because I have questions for you."

Tommy really couldn't breathe now. He gasped, trying to take in a breath, but it felt like it did nothing. His vision began to spin, and it took all his concentration not to loosen his grip on Circe's arms.

"What can you do, Lucid?" Circe asked, her smirk growing wider. "If you're powerful enough to stand next to Dream, why don't you use that power to save yourself right now?"

Because he couldn't. Because healing wasn't going to do shit for him right now. Because in nearly any combat situation, his power was completely useless.

He let out a strange choking noise as black dots began to appear in his vision, and Circe laughed.

"What? Cat got your tongue?" She teased.

Tommy felt his hands loosen their grip on Circe's wrists. He tried to hold firm, but he was far too dizzy now. He desperately tried to suck in air, but it wasn't working. He could feel his lungs spasming in his chest, begging for oxygen, but he couldn't do anything.

Finally, Tommy felt his hands go completely limp, and Circe shoved him to the side with ease. As soon as he wasn't looking into her eyes, the pressure on his throat disappeared, and he sucked in greedy gulps of air like a drowning man.

Circe, meanwhile, completely ignored him as she rose to her feet. Across the room, Tommy could see Dream pinning Moros against a wall, battling to put handcuffs on him, but he froze as soon as Circe raised her hands.

"I think we're done here," she said, puppeting Dream so he was forced to stumble away from Moros. "We've already gotten everything we can out of the chief. Not worth trying to deal with these idiots."

Dream dropped to his knees under Circe's power, and Moros brushed himself off as he rejoined Circe's side. Although they were trying to act casual, Tommy could see the way they were both hunched over, clearly exhausted from the fight.

Tommy didn't even try to get up as the two walked out the back door of the house. His head was still spinning, and if he tried to move at all, he was pretty sure he was going to throw up.

A few seconds after the villains left, Dream collapsed to the floor, Circe's power fading once she couldn't see Dream anymore. He groaned as he pushed himself to his feet, and Tommy coughed a few times as he tried to push himself up as well.

"Lucid? You good?" Dream asked, staggering over to the police chief who Tommy could now see had passed out (likely Circe's doing).

"I'm okay," he called back, his voice hoarse. He struggled to push himself to his feet, gripping the wall when more black spots dotted his vision at the movement.

Dream untied the chief, but didn't bother to try and wake him up. Even from afar, Tommy could see he was still breathing and figured the guy would wake up soon enough.

Once Dream had the chief out of his ties, he walked over to Tommy, who was still leaning on the wall for support. Without saying anything, Dream wrapped an arm around Tommy's shoulders, and Tommy shifted his weight onto Dream so the two of them could stumble out of the house together.



After that, Dream and Tommy went back home.

Dream gave him some painkillers, asked if he was alright, and Tommy said he was fine. And that was true. He *was* fine. He hadn't actually been injured by Circe or Moros. Tommy was perfectly intact, without even a single bruise to show for the fight.

That night though, when Tommy fell into a fitful sleep, he dreamed.

He dreamed of lava surrounding him. He dreamed of phantom hands wrapping around his throat. He dreamed of someone holding him close, whispering into his hair *I got you, it's okay, you're okay*.

Tommy woke up with a gasp, bolting upright in his bed as echoes of Moros' power raced through his veins. He could feel the pain, but he could also feel arms hugging him tightly. He could feel a soft voice whispering into his curls.

There was something wet on his cheek, and when he tried to wipe it away with his hand, he realized they were tears.

"I miss you," Tommy whispered to the shadows in his room, the words not so much a conscious thought, but spilling out of his lips without his permission.

He didn't know who he missed, but whoever it was, he missed them *badly*. It was an ache in his chest that he couldn't name. Like he was expecting someone to come hug him after his nightmare, to hold him until his heart stopped racing and he was calm enough to go back to sleep.

But Dream never coddled him like that. So Tommy didn't know why it felt like someone should be there for him.

Tommy spent several minutes just staring at his wall with his knees pressed against his chest. The wall in his mind was still there, locking away his memories no matter how many times he tried to move around it.

Eventually, he gave up. Tommy pushed out of bed, wincing at how cold the night air was on his legs. He padded out of his room and into the kitchen, finding the sleeping pills in the drawer next to the microwave, and dropped two of them into his hand.

One glass of water later and he was back in his bed, counting the seconds until the pills kicked in and dragged him under.

His heart rate began to slow. Tommy could almost feel that ghost of a hand running through his hair once again.

Lost in the space between a memory and a dream, Tommy let himself drift back to sleep.



Another week passed. Then, the Syndicate popped up again.

Acheron and Orpheus had broken into one of the warehouses down by the docks that stored some of the high-powered weapons heroes used. They had already taken out most of the guards, meaning that if Dream and Lucid didn't get a move on, they were going to lose some pretty valuable stuff.

It was the middle of the night when Dream shook Tommy awake. As soon as Tommy's eyes opened, Dream flicked the lights on in his room, making him flinch as he tried to hide his face in his pillow.

"Tommy, get up," Dream told him, pulling him away from the pillow. "We need to go."

Nodding at his mentor. Tommy stumbled to his feet, and began digging through his drawers in search of his mask.

About twenty minutes later, Tommy was climbing out of an armored car with Dream at his side.

He had woken up significantly during the drive, especially when Dream shoved an energy drink into his hands and told him to chug it. Now he was completely wired, electricity buzzing through his veins as he hopped from foot to foot.

"Hellion and Umbra are waiting on standby if you need backup," one of the officers told Dream as they hurried out of the car.

"We'll let you know," Dream said, giving the man a sharp nod before guiding Tommy to the warehouse doors.

This time, Dream didn't bother with trying to sneak in like they did with Circe and Moros. That was probably because of the helicopter circling overhead, alerting Acheron and Orpheus to the fact that heroes were probably already here. No use in trying to sneak around when the villains were already expecting them.

Dream pushed open the door, with Tommy following close behind. The inside of the warehouse was dimly lit by a few buzzing fluorescent lights. Towers of boxes lined the space, creating sharp shadows along the walls that sent a chill down Tommy's spine.

And there, standing in the center of the room, were Acheron and Orpheus.

Orpheus was kneeling over a cardboard box, digging through it with his legs half in the air. Acheron, meanwhile, was standing guard. Both of his swords were drawn, and as soon as Dream and Tommy stepped inside the warehouse, his glowing red eyes snapped to them.

"Was wonderin' when you guys were gonna show up," Acheron drawled. "Took you longer than I thought it would."

"It's a bit late to be doing some shopping, isn't it?" Dream asked, looking at Orpheus still digging through the box.

"What can I say? I like it when there's no lines," Acheron shot back. "But if you're itching to go back to bed, just tell us where the thing you stole is."

Tommy tensed.

Dream scoffed. "I have no idea what you're looking for, let alone where it is."

"Y'know, you'd think for a guy whose whole bit is making illusions that you'd be better at lying," Acheron taunted, taking a step towards them.

There was a hand on Tommy's shoulder. Dream squeezed once, barely lifting one of his fingers to point towards Orpheus, who was still trying to search through the box.

Great. Tommy got the ghost guy. At least he wouldn't have to deal with Acheron's insane strength.

Nodding once, Tommy tensed his legs, preparing to sprint for him. Meanwhile, Dream pulled out his axe and took a step towards Acheron.

"Guess we're doing this then," Acheron muttered.

And just like that, the fight was on.

Dream split into four copies of himself, running at Acheron from all different directions. Tommy, meanwhile, sprinted at Orpheus, who didn't even seem to be paying attention to the confrontation going on behind him.

As soon as Tommy got close enough to swing his baton out though, the villain went intangible, rolling his eyes as he floated away from the box. He solidified again, now standing in front of Tommy, and had his arms folded over his chest.

"Really? Trying to attack me from behind? That's a bit rude, don't you think?" Orpheus asked, looking more annoyed than anything else.

"Your fault for not turning around," Tommy shot back, taking another swing at him.

Again, Orpheus went intangible, and the baton harmlessly passed through him.

"Look, I'm fucking exhausted and really don't feel like fighting right now. How about we just sit back and watch those two go at it?" Orpheus suggested, jerking his thumb towards

Dream and Acheron, who were now clashing weapons.

“Not gonna happen,” Tommy hissed, lunging forward to try and take him by surprise.

No dice. The baton passed right into his chest, and Orpheus just glanced down at it like he was bored.

“God, why do you newbies have to be so energetic?” Orpheus complained, shaking his head as he solidified again, dodging another swing of Tommy’s weapon.

This was getting annoying. The dance continued on, with Tommy trying to land a single hit on Orpheus, but the man either dodged it or went intangible every single time he got close. His heart was pounding as he kept trying to find ways to take him by surprise, but nothing worked.

The strange thing was though, Orpheus wasn’t trying to fight back. He was dodging, but he wasn’t attempting to punch or kick or do much of anything to Tommy.

Suddenly, Tommy remembered one of the lessons Dream had given him during his training. He had gone over all the Syndicate members, warning Tommy of their fighting styles and tactics they would usually take.

Orpheus was not a fighter. He would keep opponents busy by dodging their hits, or possess them if things got sticky, but he rarely ever threw a punch himself. Which meant that Tommy needed to find a way to trick him into letting his guard down.

Panting, Tommy held up his hands, dropping his shoulders so he looked more exhausted than he was.

“Fine! You’re right, this is fucking stupid,” Tommy said, taking exaggerated breaths.

Orpheus narrowed his eyes. “Are you giving up?”

“I’m asking if we can take, like, a five minute break or-”

Suddenly, Tommy’s lie was cut off by a startled yell. He whipped his head to the left, and his heart leapt into his throat when he saw that Dream’s axe had clattered to the floor, and Acheron was advancing on him.

“DREAM!” Tommy yelled, moving to rush towards him.

Immediately though, Orpheus went intangible, and Tommy felt something cold rush through his entire body. Next thing he knew, the villain was standing behind him, and Tommy felt strong grabbing his arms and pulling them behind him.

“Oh no you don’t!” Orpheus said, twisting his wrist with surprising strength and forcing Tommy to drop his baton.

Tommy struggled against Orpheus’ grip as Dream scrambled for his axe. More fake Dreams appeared around him, but it didn’t help because Acheron already knew which one was the

real Dream.

“Let me go!” Tommy shouted, trying to yank his arms out of Orpheus’s hands.

“Can’t do that I’m afraid,” Orpheus told him, tugging him backwards until Tommy’s back was pressed flush against the villain’s chest. He then wrapped an arm around Tommy’s own chest, locking him there like an iron bar.

It didn’t hurt. Orpheus wasn’t holding him tightly enough to leave bruises or anything. But no matter how Tommy squirmed, he couldn’t seem to break free of him.

Dream darted down to pick up his axe, lifting it just in time to block the twin swords from coming down on his head. He pushed back against Acheron with enough strength to make the villain stumble, and Dream leapt to his feet again, twirling his axe in his hand.

Acheron rushed him. He ducked under the axe swing Dream had aimed for his head. At that moment, his swords both came forward, and suddenly, there were twin blades sticking out of Dream’s back.

“NO!” Tommy screamed, fighting against Orpheus’ arms but to no avail.

Acheron yanked his swords back, and blood began to pour down the front of Dream’s stomach as he fell to his knees. Tommy screamed again, a strangled nonsensical sound that even made Acheron wince. He shoved his elbow back as hard as he could into Orpheus’ side, and the man hissed in pain but didn’t falter.

No. Dream couldn’t die. He *couldn’t*. He was Dream. The Number One Hero. This shouldn’t be happening.

“Tell us where it is,” Acheron said, staring down at Dream as his blood stained the concrete floor.

Dream laughed, but it was weak. “Fuck you, Acheron.”

Sighing, Acheron held his sword up again. “I wanted to do this the easy way.”

Tommy’s breath caught in his throat.

Acheron lifted one of his swords above Dream, preparing to strike again.

Then, something happened.

A plume of smoke raced into the room. It shot between Acheron and Dream, and reformed into Hellion. Smoke curled from his feet and hands as he held up his own sword to match Acheron’s, the white bandana tying back his hair already stained dark grey from the ash.

“Don’t fucking touch him,” Hellion hissed.

Oh thank fucking god.

Suddenly, Tommy noticed another strange movement coming from the sharp shadows along the walls. He couldn't hear footsteps, but he saw the shadow of a lithe figure running along the wall, straight to where Orpheus had him pinned.

He smiled behind his mask as Umbra materialized from the shadow on the wall, leaping out with a dagger in hand.

"Let him go, Orpheus," she ordered, holding the dagger against Orpheus' pulse. A few pieces of her long, dark hair were caught in the silver metal mask she wore on the lower half of her face, and Tommy wondered if she and Hellion had to rush to get over here in time.

Orpheus sighed. "I suppose it was time we head out anyway," he said, going intangible again and floating back towards Acheron. The other Syndicate leader was backing away from Hellion, who was crouching protectively over Dream's bleeding form.

As soon as the arms around him disappeared, Tommy stumbled forward, ears ringing as he turned his focus back onto Dream.

He ran over to his mentor, immediately yanking up his shirt to see the stab wounds for himself. I was bleeding a lot, and Dream already seemed out of it, mumbling something under his breath as his blank smiley face stared at the ceiling.

"This has been fun, but it seems like you don't have what we're looking for, meaning we will be heading out," Orpheus said, floating behind Acheron and towards the door.

"You think you can just get away that easily?" Hellion demanded, racing forward in another plume of smoke so he was standing right in front of the two villains.

"Hellion," Umbra called, catching his attention. "I think we need to focus on Dream."

At this, Hellion faltered as Umbra pointed to Tommy and Dream.

"While you take care of your Number One Hero, we'll be heading out," Orpheus taunted.

"See ya later," Acheron waved, trudging out the back door of the warehouse.

Orpheus, meanwhile, disappeared in a blink. This left Hellion, Umbra, Dream, and Tommy as the only ones in the warehouse.

"Shit, Dream, are you still awake?" Tommy asked, trying to stop the bleeding with his hands.

"I'm here," Dream mumbled softly.

"Okay, that's good," Tommy breathed, a deafening ringing echoing through his ears. "I'm gonna heal you now, okay?"

"Okay," Dream whispered, his head lolling.

Shit. Okay. Now it was time for Tommy to do his job.

Gritting his teeth, Tommy braced himself. Then, he let the familiar energy warm up his hands.

One second. Two seconds.

Tommy waited.

And then the pain hit.

Tommy gasped as pain ripped through his stomach, phantom swords slicing themselves clean through him. He could feel the heat of the wound making itself known in his abdomen as he kept his hands on Dream, refusing to move them even as the pain grew stronger.

Whimpers slipped out of Tommy's mouth as he felt his own blood pool around his legs, pouring from his stomach. Soon, the whimpers grew into cries, and Tommy could also feel hot tears spilling down his cheeks under his mask.

Healing was an extremely valuable power to have. Unfortunately for Tommy, the kind of healing he inherited came with a cruel drawback.

Tommy screamed as the stab wound on Dream's stomach finally closed. Yanking his hands away, Tommy fell back onto the concrete, his own hands flying to his stomach to feel the hole that his mind was telling him was there.

There was nothing. No blood pouring from his stomach. No stab wounds.

Whenever Tommy healed a wound, his mind would trick him into thinking he had that same wound. He would feel all the pain of it like it was his own. Physically, he was fine. But his mind was convinced that Tommy himself had been stabbed, and it always took a few minutes for the effect to wear off.

He stared at the ceiling, gasping for breath as the echoes of false pain faded away. Minutes ticked on, and soon the fire in his gut was gone, letting him finally take a deep breath and come back to the present moment.

Dream was alright. He was sitting up against the wall, talking quietly to Hellion while Umbra looked through the box Orpheus had been digging through.

None of them were focused on him. Yet Tommy could feel eyes on him. Watching him.

Sitting up, Tommy looked around the warehouse but couldn't see anything unusual.

The feeling of being watched didn't fade until they left the warehouse.

Chapter End Notes

here's your latest who's who for this chapter
circe - niki, moros - jack, hellion - sapnap, umbra - tina

also a note I want to make: if it feels odd that I made Jack so cruel and have such a fucked up power, let me justify myself. I write characters, not cc's, so Jack in this fic is heavily influenced by his dsmp lore. specifically, his power to make people feel as though they are burning like how Tommy described is based off of how he had a canon death where he burnt to death in lava. also c!jack's struggles are often overlooked by everyone around him, so I wanted to give him a power that would force people to pay attention to him. they have to look in his eyes for it to work, and he can make them feel the same pain he's felt. he forces them to understand him, if that makes sense.

oh and I'm trying to do different powers for most people who had major roles in clinic, so while clinic!niki had water manipulation that also allowed her to manipulate blood, forgotten!niki can only control blood. I just really liked letting niki bloodbend in clinic so I wanted to have more of that in this fic lmao

I have a spotify playlist for this fic now! go check it out [here](#)

I also have a discord server! at the moment is largely centered around my other fic, clinic, but once clinic ends it will be shifting and have bit more focus on this fic! I sometimes talk about behind the scenes worldbuilding stuff or give sneak peeks at upcoming chapters so check it out <https://discord.gg/XzcjrtckFa>

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed! please let me know what you thought down in the comments! i don't reply to most of them but I read them all and they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

worth

Chapter Summary

Dream reminds Tommy of who he can trust.

Chapter Notes

hello people!! yes I am here with more world forgetting!

now that clinic is over I can put my full focus into this and I'm so excited for it! still dealing with school so I have no idea how regularly I'll be able to update, but hopefully it's pretty frequently! I'm so happy I can put my full focus into this now, I can't wait for you guys to see what I have in store :)

TWs: violence as per usual

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Someone was knocking at the door.

Tommy glanced up from his game (he was playing Animal Crossing on Dream's switch), already tensing as Dream got up from the couch.

“Should I go to my room?” Tommy asked in a low voice, watching Dream readjust his mask as he headed for the door.

“Not yet,” Dream told him, holding out a hand to stop him from getting up. “If I say something about the house being messy, that’s your cue to run to your room. But be quiet about it, okay?”

He nodded, setting the switch down so he could be prepared to get up at a moment’s notice.

Perching himself so he was draped over the back of the couch, Tommy watched Dream go to the door and peek through the peephole. Then, he sighed and tugged his mask off, his back to Tommy so Tommy couldn’t see his face. Then, he cracked open the door.

“Uh, hey Sapnap, what’s up?” Dream greeted.

“Nothing much. I just realized it’d been a while since we hung out so I thought I’d stop by,” this ‘Sapnap’ replied. “Can I come in?”

Dream paused and made the crack in the door even smaller. “Um, y’know, I totally would, but I got Lucid in here with me and he doesn’t have his mask on.”

“So? I’m not wearing my mask either,” Sapnap pointed out. “I feel like we’ve all worked together enough to trust each other.”

“Well, you see, Lucid doesn’t want anyone to know who he is,” Dream explained. “He’s very secretive about his identity.”

That wasn’t exactly true. Tommy had actually asked Dream multiple times why none of the other heroes in the tower were allowed to know who he was, but Dream kept insisting it was for his own safety. Not to mention, it was technically illegal for minors to be heroes, so Dream had to keep Tommy’s age a secret from even the Hero Committee.

All heroes were supposed to have their civilian identities registered with the Hero Committee. But Dream had wanted to keep everything about Tommy’s rescue from the Syndicate quiet, because, as he explained, it was too risky to let even the other heroes know where he’d come from. So it took Dream cashing in a lot of favors to get Lucid registered as a hero with the Committee without having to provide all that personal information.

“Aw c’mon, man. I literally helped train him!” Sapnap argued, and Tommy wondered which hero this was. “He’s gotta know he can trust me. Plus, I wanna see if he’s okay after that last fight we had. Can you at least ask him if I can come in?”

Dream shook his head. “I’m sorry but I know him and he doesn’t want anyone except for me to know who he is. He was very adamant about that when I gave him the offer to become my sidekick.”

Sapnap huffed. “Look, Dream, I’m gonna be honest. This is starting to get fucking weird, okay? One day you just showed up with this random dude with zero training that literally none of us knew, and said that he was gonna be your sidekick. No one knows a single damn thing about him except that he’s basically attached to your side. It’s like you’re trying to hide him from the rest of us or some shit.”

Tommy was debating if he could run to his room and grab his mask so he could talk directly to Sapnap—whatever he was—himself and convince him it was fine, but Dream spoke again before he could get up.

“I’m not trying to *hide* him! He just wants to keep his privacy, what’s so hard to understand about that?” Dream exclaimed, and Tommy could tell he was getting annoyed.

“It’s not- Ugh, fuck, can I just talk to him myself?” Sapnap asked.

“His voice changer is in his mask,” Dream told him, folding his arms over his chest.

“Fine, then tell him to put it on. I wanna hear this all from him directly,” Sapnap demanded.

Sighing, Dream ran his hand through his hair. “God, fine. Lucid, go get your mask.”

Well, guess that was his cue.

Jumping off the couch, Tommy ran to his room and grabbed his mask out of his drawer. He pulled it over his head, whispering under his breath to make sure the voice changer was on. Then he rushed back out into the foyer and towards the front door, but stayed behind it instead of going up to the opening. Dream still didn't have his mask on, and Tommy was sure Dream didn't want to explain to Sapnap why Lucid hadn't seen Dream's face.

"I'm here," Tommy said after he'd caught his breath.

"Lucid? It's Hellion," Sapnap said, and well, now Tommy knew Hellion's name and voice.
"Why don't you want me to see your face?"

Although Dream was facing away from him, Tommy could read the tension lining his shoulders. Tommy had to be careful about how he answered this.

"I don't want anyone to know my identity," Tommy explained, hoping the voice changer hid the wavering in his tone. "I got, um, a family that I don't want to get involved with this shit. If anything gets leaked, I'd be fucked."

That was a complete lie, but he had to say something convincing. With the hand that was behind the door, Dream gave him a thumbs up.

"Dude, I'm not gonna leak anything!" Sapnap exclaimed. "Do you really think I'd do that?"

"No! Not at all," Tommy hurried to explain, wincing at the hurt in Sapnap's voice. "I just don't want to risk it with anyone. But I promise it's got nothing to do with you personally."

There was a moment of silence on the other end of the door, creeping through the air and into the apartment like a dark cloud. Tommy twisted his fingers into the hem of his shirt, biting the inside of his cheek as he pleaded with the universe to let Sapnap believe him.

Finally, after a few seconds,

"Fine," Sapnap huffed, sounding pissed. "I can't force you to trust me. But just- I dunno, let me know if you change your mind."

Tommy opened his mouth to apologize, but Dream spoke before he could.

"I'll text you later, Sapnap," Dream said. Sapnap just muttered a goodbye in response.

And with that, Dream slammed the door shut, and Tommy immediately dropped his eyes as Dream put his mask back on.

"You can look up now."

Tommy lifted his head again and saw Dream had secured his mask back over his face. Meanwhile, Tommy reached up to undo the straps on his own head, and let his frowning mask fall into his hands.

"Why can't I trust Hellion?" Was the first thing Tommy asked as Dream strolled back into the living room. "I thought he was one of your closest friends."

"He is," Dream said simply, dropping back down on the couch. Tommy followed, settling himself on the floor where he had been sitting before, but didn't bother picking up the switch again. Instead he messed with the mask in his hands, running his fingers over the cool porcelain.

"Then why can't I tell him who I am?" Tommy pushed, frowning at Dream. "Sure, he might get pissed I'm seventeen, but I doubt he'd report you to the Committee."

Sighing, Dream leaned his head back to stare at the ceiling. "Tommy, do you really think I like keeping everything about you a secret from Hellion? Or from Cordyceps? They're my two closest friends. I'd tell them everything if I could."

Tommy's frown deepened. "Nothing's stopping you."

Tilting his head back down, Dream's beady-eyed smile met Tommy's. "C'mon Tommy, use your head. Right now the Syndicate is wreaking havoc in the city because they're looking for something of theirs that was stolen. You and I both know that thing they're looking for is most likely you, but what would happen if the other heroes knew that? What do you think would happen if the Syndicate pulls a stunt big enough to cause some major damage, and the others know that the solution to the problem is sitting in the middle of the Hero Tower?"

The puzzle pieces fell into place in his mind, and Tommy's mouth went dry.

"You... You think they'd hand me over to them?" Tommy asked in a small voice.

"I don't think they'd want to, but if the Syndicate pulls something big, it'll certainly become a topic of discussion. And if that happens, there's not going to be anything I can do to stop them." Leaning forward, Dream rested his elbows on his knees. "I'm just trying to protect you, Tommy. But I can't protect you if the other heroes know who you are and where you came from."

Shit. He was right. If the Syndicate pulled something that hurt a lot of people and the heroes knew that they could just hand Tommy over to get them to stop, they very well could decide that was the best course of action.

But wasn't it selfish of Tommy to put others lives at risk because he didn't want to go back?

"What if that's the right thing to do though?" Tommy murmured, his eyes dropping to his lap. "I don't want people to get hurt because of me."

Dream made a tsking noise and shook his head. "Don't think like that. I'm not sending you back to the people that kidnapped you, no matter what. It might be wrong, but you deserve better than that."

Tommy clenched his jaw. "But I'm not worth it. I'm just some random homeless kid. Why should my safety be worth more than innocent people's lives?"

There was a shuffling in front of him, and Tommy could hear Dream climbing down from the couch and onto the floor with him. He scooted over so he was sitting right in front of Tommy,

and grabbed his chin so he could lift Tommy's head.

"You are worth it," Dream told him. "You're my sidekick. You've saved my life, and by extension, you're helping to save the lives of everyone in this city. You've already proved your worth ten times over. Which is exactly why I'm never going to let the Syndicate have you again, even if I have to go against the other heroes to keep you safe."

Taking a shaky breath, Tommy nodded as Dream reached out to squeeze his hand. He could trust Dream. Dream was going to keep him safe from the Syndicate, no matter what. He just had to trust him.



THUMP!

Tommy yelped as pain radiated through the back of his skull. The mat beneath him softened his fall, but his vision was still sent spinning at the force of Dream's hit.

"Is that all you got?" Dream taunted, standing above him as he twirled the training staff in his hand. "C'mon Lucid, I know you can do better than that."

Gritting his teeth, Tommy leapt to his feet, ignoring the headache that throbbed behind his eyes as he readjusted the grip on his own staff. The smell of rubber and sweat filled his nose as he shook the rest of the pain off, stepping around Dream in a circle as he tried to find an opening to strike.

After their last two run-ins with the Syndicate, Dream had determined that Tommy needed far more training if he was going to properly defend himself. So they were back in the gym, and Tommy was already aching all over. He knew that he was going to be covered in bruises tomorrow, but it was worth it. Tommy needed to be better, because if he wasn't, he could get killed.

Tommy kept circling Dream, waiting for the perfect moment. Dream met his gaze behind his smiling mask, and Tommy shivered under the weight of his stare.

Then, the door to the gym opened, and Dream looked to see who came in.

At that moment, Tommy leapt. He swung at Dream with his staff, almost yelping with the force that Dream's own staff whipped up to block him. Doubling back, Tommy then swept his staff along the ground, hitting Dream's ankles and sending him stumbling to the side.

Before Dream could regain his footing, Tommy swung the staff again, nailing him in the side. Dream let out a hiss of pain, and suddenly Tommy felt the wood slamming into the side of his mask.

He dropped to the floor, his ears ringing with the force of the hit. The mask had shielded him from actually getting hit in the face, but it still threw him off, and he struggled to scramble back to his feet.

Dream waited for him to get up. Then, as soon as he was standing, Tommy felt the butt of the staff slam into his stomach, and he gasped as all the wind got knocked out of him. He tried to lift his staff to block the next hit, but he was a fraction of a second too late, and his leg screamed in pain as his knees buckled underneath him.

Falling back down onto the mat, Tommy barely got a chance to take a breath before one final hit was slamming into his mask again. He bit his tongue at the force of the hit, and the taste of iron flooded his mouth as he dropped face first on the ground.

“Good attempt. You used the distraction to take me off guard, which was smart. But you need to get faster at blocking,” Dream told him while Tommy gasped for air.

Tommy coughed as he forced himself to swallow the blood in his mouth. Then, he took a moment to close his eyes, resting his forehead against the plastic cushion as he struggled to get oxygen back into his body.

“C-Can we take a break?” Tommy asked, his leg throbbing where Dream had hit him.

“Lucid, you know that you won’t get breaks in a real fight,” Dream reminded him, his tone dripping with disapproval.

The mask was his saving grace in that moment because it hid the scowl that flashed over his face at Dream’s words. Yeah, he fucking *knew* he wouldn’t get a break in a real fight. He hadn’t gotten a break when he had to tackle Circe immediately after having Moros’ powers used on him.

Before Tommy could open his mouth to reply, a different voice cut in between them.

“C’mom Dream, give him a break, you’ve been beating his ass for the past hour.”

Glancing up from the mat, Tommy watched Gamble stroll over to the two of them, hands shoved into his pockets with his expression hidden by his clown mask.

Dream huffed, but dropped the staff. “You haven’t been here the entire hour, Gamble.”

“Maybe not,” Gamble shrugged, looking between the two of them, “but Umbra has.”

He gestured behind him, where Tommy could see Umbra disappearing into shadows along the wall, and reappearing to throw a knife at a training dummy. At the mention of her name, she paused and waved at them, before melting back into a shadow.

Suddenly, there was a loud tearing noise, and Hourglass materialized right next to Gamble.

“Hey guys!” Hourglass greeted, waving at Dream and Tommy before slinging his arm over Gamble’s shoulders. “How’s training going?”

“It’s going,” Dream said, turning to reach a hand out for Tommy.

Tommy took the hand, wincing as Dream yanked him to his feet. His vision spun for a moment, but he closed his eyes to shake it off. Then, he reopened his eyes, and took a breath

to steady himself as black dots danced in his sight.

“You’re so negative all the time,” Gamble huffed, leaning into Hourglass’ side. “Lucid, you’re doing great. Not many of us could even stand after fighting Dream for as long as you have.”

Cheeks burning under his mask, Tommy dipped his head in silent thanks to Gamble.

“I’m not saying he’s bad,” Dream immediately defended, nudging Tommy’s side with his elbow. “Lucid, c’mon, you know you’re good. I’m just trying to make sure that next time we run into the Syndicate, we don’t get our asses handed to us so quickly.”

“Yeah, don’t worry. I know,” Tommy mumbled, nudging Dream back.

Hourglass brought one hand up to his multi-colored goggles, adjusting them as his brows furrowed together. “Is it just me, or has the Syndicate gotten way more intense in our fights recently?”

“Oh thank god, so it wasn’t just me feeling like I was getting the shit kicked out of me,” Gamble groaned.

Dream shook his head. “No. Lucid and I have definitely been feeling the heat as well.”

“Why do you guys think that is?” Hourglass asked.

Tommy huffed loudly. “I mean, it’s pretty fucking obvious, innit? They’re trying to hunt down that thing that got stolen, and they’re fucking pissed about it.”

“Well, obviously that’s the reason we’ve seen an increase in their activity,” Hourglass agreed, “but I meant that their fighting has gotten a lot harder to deal with too.”

“Lucid said it best. They’re fucking pissed so they’re not pulling punches anymore,” Gamble explained, nudging Hourglass’ side with a snort.

Hourglass winced. “It’s kind of embarrassing to think they weren’t even putting in their full effort this whole time.”

“It’s alright, that just means we can’t afford to pull our punches anymore either,” Dream said, resting an arm on Tommy’s shoulder. “Which is why you two should let us go back to training.”

Great. More training. Tommy’s muscles were already screaming, and he wasn’t sure how much more he could take today.

“Aw, c’mon! Can’t we sit and watch?” Gamble asked, and Tommy could hear the grin in his voice.

Walking to the edge of the mat, Dream bent down to pick up the two water bottles they’d brought with them, and tossed one to Tommy. He snatched it right before it smacked him in the face, and lifted up his mask just enough to show his mouth so he could drink some of it.

The cool water was heavenly going down his throat, and it took all his self control not to chug the entire bottle right then and there.

“Nope, you’ll distract us,” Dream shot back, twisting the cap back onto his own water bottle. “Besides, Hellion’s looking for you.”

“He is?” Hourglass asked, perking up.

Tugging his mask back down over his mouth, Dream shrugged. “Well, I didn’t actually hear that. But considering the three of you are practically attached at the hip, I wouldn’t be surprised if he was.”

This made Hourglass pout, while Gamble just chuckled. “Fine, you win this time, Dream. But I’m gonna sneak in so I can watch you two train one of these days, just so I can cheer Lucid on in kicking your ass.”

Behind his own mask, Tommy grinned. He had always liked Gamble. While the two of them hadn’t interacted much, the few times they had, the man had been surprisingly nice to him. Not that the other heroes weren’t nice, but Gamble seemed to genuinely care about him, while everyone else was just being polite.

Tommy thought about Dream’s warning. About the heroes possibly deciding to hand him over to the Syndicate if they found out he was what they were looking for.

Would Gamble agree to that too? While he wanted to say no, the truth was, he barely knew the guy. The same went for all the heroes. The only one he really knew was Dream, which meant no matter how nice the others were to him, Dream was the only one he could trust. He had to remind himself of that.

“If Lucid ever manages to kick my ass, believe me, I’ll be cheering right there with you,” Dream joked, nudging Tommy’s side. “But for now, you’ve still got a lot to learn.”

Biting back a sigh, Tommy nodded. “I know, Dream.”

“Aw, don’t be like that,” Dream said, reaching up to ruffle his hair. “C’mon, let’s have some fun with it. If you manage to land a hit on me before I can knock you down, we can order whatever you want for dinner.”

Now *this* made Tommy perk up. With Dream’s hero salary, being given full freedom of their dinner choices gave him a ridiculous amount of options. He could order something all rich people ate in movies. Like lobster, or steak. Some real fancy shit like that.

“Deal,” Tommy told him, straightening up as he ran to grab his staff.

Gamble and Hourglass both chuckled at his eagerness. “Make sure to order something really expensive when you win,” Gamble said, already walking away from the mat with Hourglass leaning against his side.

“I’m gonna break his bank account,” Tommy shot back, making Gamble laugh even harder.

“Okay, maybe I need to put some limits.”

“Nope! You made a promise to him!” Gamble pointed out, having to yell now to be heard across the gym. “If you don’t let him order a super expensive steak I’m gonna beat you up, Dream!”

“Wow, I’m so terrified,” Dream drawled, and Tommy could hear him rolling his eyes.

Gamble flipped him off before disappearing through the gym doors with Hourglass at his side. Once they were gone, Dream picked up his own staff and pointed it at Tommy, while Tommy scrambled to get into his spot on the other end of the mat.

“You ready?” Dream asked.

Ignoring the aches flashing through his limbs, Tommy forced himself to focus on the promise of a delicious dinner instead.

“I’m ready.”

In the end, Tommy wound up with a crack in his mask and a lump on the side of his head. Despite his best efforts, he never managed to land a hit on his mentor before he found himself lying flat on his back.

At least Dream was nice enough to let Tommy choose the restaurant they ordered from for dinner, even if he wasn’t allowed to order the most expensive thing on the menu like he wanted.

The burger he got was good. But it wasn’t good enough to distract him from the myriad of bruises painted across his arms and legs. Symbols of his failure.

He would do better. He had to. For Dream.



Things went quiet again. The Hero Tower was on high alert, waiting for the next move the Syndicate was no doubt going to pull.

But there was nothing. Weeks passed with no appearances from any of the infamous villains, and the restless energy was palpable in the air of the tower. Everyone was on edge, waiting for the ball to drop.

Tensions rose. Arguments broke out between heroes more frequently. Training got more intense. Tommy found himself reaching for painkillers more often than not. Even Dream seemed to be feeling the stress, snapping at Tommy over the smallest of things, only to apologize a moment later when he realized how uncalled for his reaction had been.

It was a bad time, and Tommy hated how desperate he was for the Syndicate to do something just so it didn’t feel like they were all waiting for a bomb to go off.

But then, the timer ran out, and the Syndicate came back.

"So you're saying this place is gonna fucking blow up?!" Tommy shouted at Dream, his voice echoing in time with their footsteps as they raced up the stairs.

"According to Thanatos it will!" Dream shouted back, a few steps ahead of Tommy. "The other heroes will be here soon, but we're the first to show up so we gotta hold them off as long as we can."

"Then shouldn't we be trying to find the explosives and disarm them?" Tommy asked, his legs burning as they passed the next landing.

"We don't know how to disarm bombs, Lucid. We need to try and get the detonator from Thanatos' hand," Dream said, his boots thudding against the metal stairs.

The air was heavy with the smell of dust. Fluorescent lights flickered along the walls, and Tommy grimaced as they passed another landing, the sign next to the door taunting them with how many more floors they had to go.

They continued to run. Tommy's mind raced through the little information he'd been given before he and Dream had been sent out. Thanatos, Orpheus, and Acheron were holding this office building hostage, once again demanding the return of what was taken from them. Explosives had been set up inside, and even though it was late at night, there were currently fifteen office workers who had stayed late and were still inside.

Thanatos apparently had the detonator. That meant he was their target.

By the time they reached the top floor, Tommy's legs were screaming with every step. His breath was coming out in labored gasps, and his heart was pounding so loudly in his ears that it was difficult to hear anything else. But he couldn't afford to be tired right now. Not when they were about to jump into a fight.

Standing on the other side of the door to the roof, Dream held up a hand. They both paused, and Tommy could even hear Dream panting behind his mask. The seconds ticked on as they both gulped air into their lungs, and soon enough, Tommy's vision stopped spinning.

Then, Dream straightened up. He put a hand on the door handle, and gestured for Tommy to come closer to him. Once Tommy was at his side, he dropped his hand, and pushed the door open.

The icy wind blowing across the rooftop was a blessed change from the stuffiness of the stairwell. Tommy raced out behind Dream, gravel crunching under his boots. For a moment, Tommy was blinded when a helicopter flew overhead, the bright searchlight shining right on his face. But then he blinked the dark spots out of his vision, and managed to make out what was going on.

Thanatos, Orpheus, and Acheron all stood on the edge of the rooftop. Thanatos' wings were spread out, black feathers curling around his two companions. To his left, Orpheus stood, and to his right, there was Acheron.

But Tommy didn't focus on the faces of the three villains. No, he instead found his gaze drawn to the small silver device clutched in Thanatos' left hand. The detonator.

"Did they seriously make you take the stairs?" Orpheus asked, looking like he wanted to laugh at the two sweaty heroes. "Couldn't have dropped you out of this annoying motherfucker?" He pointed at the helicopter still circling overhead.

"We asked and they said no," Tommy shot back, wincing when Dream elbowed him in the side for that.

Unlike Dream, who just seemed annoyed at Tommy's quip, Orpheus tilted his head back and laughed. "Damn, guess the budget is really getting strained."

"Eh, look at how scrawny Lucid is," Acheron chimed in, pointing at Tommy. "He probably needed to build some muscle."

Okay, now that was just rude.

"Oh fuck off!" Tommy yelled, glaring at Acheron. "I'm not fucking scrawny! I'll have your bitch ass know that I'm super buff and work out all the time!"

"Really?" Acheron questioned, taking a step off the ledge towards Tommy and Dream. "Because last time we saw each other, you didn't seem that strong to me."

While Acheron's tone remained light, Tommy tensed at the reminder of their last meeting. When Acheron had stabbed Dream, while Orpheus held him back so he was powerless to do anything.

Speaking of, where was Orpheus?

Having been distracted by Acheron's taunts, Tommy only just now realized that Orpheus had disappeared from the left side of Thanatos. That meant he could've been anywhere on the roof. Even right next to-

Suddenly, Tommy felt something shove in between him and Dream. Stumbling to the side, Tommy whipped his head around just in time to see Orpheus lunging for Dream.

Although Orpheus was the weakest of the trio, he had the advantage of surprise. When Dream tried to take a swing at him, the villain went intangible and phased right through him. He solidified behind Dream and grabbed him in a headlock, while pinning his arms behind his back.

Eyes widening, Tommy whipped his head around just in time to see Acheron rushing for him. He yelped as the villain barreled into him, wrapping his arms around his torso and lifting him from the air almost like one would do to an unruly child.

"Put me down!" Tommy yelled, kicking his feet as Acheron carried him to the opposite side of the roof.

"Yeah yeah, I'm doin' it," Acheron grunted, before immediately letting go of Tommy.

Tommy crumpled to the ground and immediately fell to his knees. He hadn't been expecting to just be dropped like that, and he hissed as his legs slammed into the hard roof.

Ignoring the bruises he could already feel forming on his knees, Tommy scrambled to his feet again, reaching for the baton on his belt.

Before he could get a hand on it though, Acheron was grabbing him by the shoulders and shoving him into the nearest wall. Tommy hissed when his head slammed against the brick, pain radiating out over his skull. He tried to squirm against Acheron's grip, but quickly realized it was pointless, as the villain was using his ridiculous strength to keep Tommy pinned.

"Don't bother fighting it," Acheron told him, looking back towards Orpheus and Dream.

"Fuck you!" Tommy shot back. If he hadn't had his mask on, he would've tried to bite Acheron's arm. That would've gotten his attention alright.

Even as he continued to struggle though, Tommy followed Acheron's gaze to the other side of the roof. Strangely enough, Dream had stopped fighting against Orpheus' headlock, and for a moment Tommy wondered if Orpheus had knocked Dream out. But it seemed like Orpheus was confused too. He frowned, glancing down at Dream's mask and opening his mouth to say something.

Before he could though, Tommy watched Orpheus' eyes go wide. Then, there was a faint shimmer around both him and Dream as a faint, white light began to glow from Orpheus' eyes.

"What the- Oh you fucking bastard! I'm not letting you go that easily!" Orpheus yelled, tightening the arm around Dream's head.

"But you can't even see me right now," Dream taunted, pressing further back against Orpheus.

"I can still feel my arms around you!" Orpheus hissed back, although his voice was starting to waver.

The arms pressing Tommy to the wall tensed as Acheron straightened up. Thanatos, who had spent the whole confrontation so far on the edge of the roof with the detonator in his hand, took a step towards Dream and Orpheus.

"Dream, cut the illusion," Thanatos ordered, his voice cracking through the air like a whip.

Even though Dream was the one being held in a headlock, he let out a bone-chilling laugh that even made Tommy want to shudder. "Orpheus can make it stop at any time! He just has to let me go," Dream taunted.

"I-I'm not going to," Orpheus said, although he had to force the words out through gritted teeth. He was looking around the roof wildly, his eyes still glowing that faint white.

Tommy knew that right now, Orpheus wasn't able to see the roof. He couldn't see Dream, Thanatos, Acheron, or even Tommy for that matter. Instead, he was trapped in an illusion Dream had created for him.

Dream didn't use that part of his power often. Because it was a much more complicated illusion than just copying himself, it required him to be touching whoever the victim was for an extended period of time. In most instances, Dream wasn't exactly holding hands with the villains they fought for long enough to pull that off. But Orpheus had been holding onto him for a while now, giving Dream enough time to suck him into the illusion.

"Tell me, Orpheus, what are you seeing right now?" Dream asked, sounding as relaxed as could be despite Thanatos walking towards him.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Orpheus ducked his head and let out a low groan. "Don't you fucking know where I am!?"

"While I could set up a specific location for you to be at, I figured this time I'd let your mind show you the place you hate most. I have no idea where you're at right now," Dream explained, leaning further back against Orpheus.

And that was the most terrifying part of this second ability Dream had. While he could choose to show the victim a specific illusion, he could also probe the mind to create an illusion of its own.

"It's hard to explain how I do it," Dream had told him one day, when they were slumped against the couch and passing a bowl of popcorn between them. "I guess I can kind of... feel someone's fear when I'm trying to trap them in an illusion? I don't know what the fear is, but I can sense it, and if I push it in just the right way, it can form the illusion for me."

"But you don't actually know what your illusion is showing them?" Tommy asked between a mouthful of popcorn.

"No, I don't. But sometimes I can hear things from that space. Like a voice, or maybe footsteps. Things like that." Dream paused then, turning away from the TV screen and straightening up against the cushions. "I could try it on you, if you're that curious?"

Clenching his jaw, Tommy shook his head. "Uh, no thanks. Doesn't sound that fun."

Right now, Tommy was really glad he never took Dream up on his offer.

Orpheus was still holding onto Dream, but his hands were shaking now. "I-I'm not- this isn't-"

"Are you at a train station?" Dream suddenly asked. "That's a pretty loud train whistle, wouldn't you say?"

Thanatos and Acheron both stiffened at this.

"Orpheus," Thanatos cut in, taking another step towards the two of them. "It's not real. You're not there."

"I know I'm not," Orpheus snapped, although he didn't sound sure of himself at all. "I'm not-I know I'm not there. I can't be!"

"The train is getting louder," Dream teased in a sing-song tone. "Are you trying to get on the train? Is that it, Orpheus?"

Orpheus was squeezing his eyes shut again, shaking his head over and over like he was trying to get something out of his head.

"I'm not there I'm not there I'm not there--" he was chanting this to himself while Thanatos watched, clearly wanting to do something, but still eyeing the detonator in his own hand. If he tried to make a move to grab Dream to get him away from Orpheus, he might drop the detonator, or Dream could try to trap him in an illusion as well.

Meanwhile, Acheron seemed to have nearly forgotten about Tommy at this point. His grip on Tommy was still unbreakable, but he was shooting daggers at Dream with his eyes, and Tommy could tell he was just barely holding himself back from lunging at the hero.

Then,

"FUCK!"

In one swift motion, Orpheus shoved Dream away from him and dropped to his knees. He pressed his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut, like he was trying to block out a sound only he could hear.

Straightening up, Dream turned to Thanatos, who was already backing away and holding the detonator above his head. Acheron followed Dream and Thanatos' movements, and Tommy decided that this was the best opportunity he was going to get.

Using the small bit of space between him and Acheron, Tommy brought his leg up and kicked out as hard as he could. The heel of his boot caught Acheron square in the chest. Having been focused on Thanatos and Dream, Acheron stumbled back just enough for his arms to fall away from Tommy.

Darting away from Acheron, Tommy sprinted towards Dream and Thanatos with Acheron hot on his tail. "Dream!"

Dream whipped his head over to Tommy, tensing when he noticed Acheron chasing him. Immediately, five different Dreams appeared around him, and they all pointed at Thanatos who was standing on the edge of the roof once again.

"You handle him!" Dream and his illusions all shouted. Then, the Dreams turned to face Acheron, all taking out their swords in unison.

Great. Dream could take on Acheron, while Tommy could handle Thanatos.

Well, Tommy hoped he could handle Thanatos. He'd never actually fought him before.

He rushed to the edge of the roof. Thanatos stood, wings spread out in some grand gesture behind him. With the wind blowing and the helicopter circling above their heads, Thanatos' dark robes and shimmering veil billowed in the breeze. In a way, he almost looked like a statue. Face shrouded in mystery, standing perfectly still with the detonator gripped between his claws.

"I wouldn't come any closer, mate," he warned Tommy as he approached.

Tommy paused in his steps. He eyed the hand Thanatos held on the detonator, his heart pounding in his ears as he reached for the baton on his hip.

"What's it going to take to get you to hand the detonator over?" Tommy asked, having to shout to be heard over the wind.

Thanatos shrugged, and his wings shifted with him. "We've told you what we want. I don't think it needs to be repeated."

Tommy gulped, and was once again grateful the mask hid his expression. "Why are you so hellbent on getting this thing back?" He asked, struggling to keep his voice even.

"I don't think that's really any of your business, little hero," Thanatos told him. "It's personal, and that's all you need to know about that."

Then, before Tommy could do anything else, Thanatos lifted his wings. In one swift motion, he launched himself into the sky, detonator in hand as he began to fly over the rooftop, just out of reach of Tommy and Dream.

Turning around as Thanatos began to circle overhead, Tommy saw Orpheus had pushed to his feet, and was blinking a few times to try and get his bearings. The white glow had faded from his eyes, signaling he was free of Dream's illusion. Still, he seemed a bit out of it, only glancing up when Thanatos flew right over his head.

"Where is he going, Lucid?!" Dream shouted, ducking under one of Acheron's swings.

"I don't know!" Tommy shouted back, craning his neck up to see what Thanatos was doing.

"We can't let him leave the building with the detonator!" Dream yelled.

Lifting one of his swords, Dream slashed the front of Acheron's chest. The villain faltered as blood poured down his shirt, and although Tommy knew this wouldn't do anything to stop him in the long run, it would give Dream a few seconds to breathe.

Touching the com on his wrist, Dream looked up at the helicopter still circling above.

"You have permission to fire! I repeat, you have permission to fire! But whatever you do, don't fire on-"

Acheron lunged at Dream before he could finish the sentence. Dream yelped as he brought his sword up to block Acheron's hit, while Dream's order seemed to finally bring Orpheus back to reality.

“SHIT!” Orpheus yelled, looking up as Thanatos was still flying around, too high up to hear Dream give the order. “Thanatos, you need-”

Orpheus was cut off by the sound of gunshots. Tommy shrieked and dropped to the ground, covering his head as the helicopter overhead began to rain down a flurry of bullets.

In front of him, Tommy saw Orpheus go intangible, the bullets passing through him and hitting the ground. Meanwhile, Thanatos dove lower, struggling to dodge the gunfire the helicopter crew was now aiming at him.

Then, two things happened at once.

First, Thanatos let out a pained yell, and Tommy watched as his wings faltered and he crashed down onto the far edge of the roof.

Second, Acheron collapsed to the ground, a stray bullet having caught him in the head.

“FUCK! Stop firing!” Dream yelled, stepping back from Acheron’s dead body as the gunshots went silent. He brought the com up to his face again, and began to scream into it. “You fucking idiots! You’ve fucked us!”

Tommy stared at Acheron’s body, his heart just about pounding out of his chest. It seemed like him and Dream were both frozen in fear as they stared at the villain, waiting for what they both knew was about to happen.

There was another lesson Tommy had been taught by Dream during his training. One specific to Acheron.

“Whatever you do, Tommy, you can never kill Acheron in a fight. If you do, it’ll be the worst mistake of your life.”

Acheron wasn’t moving yet, but Tommy knew he would soon. He couldn’t tear his eyes away from the villain, even when Orpheus ran past him to get to Thanatos.

“Wh-What do we do?” Tommy asked Dream, struggling to keep his hands from shaking.

Dream’s blank smile was fixed on Acheron as he brought his com back up to his face.

“We’re running out of time. Get the other heroes here *now!*”

And just like that, Acheron’s eyes flew open, and Tommy could see they were glowing an ever brighter shade of red than usual.

Both Dream and Tommy took a step back as the villain pushed to his feet. There was blood matting his pink hair, but the wound itself had already closed up.

“Thanks for that, Dream,” Acheron said, stretching out his limbs and twirling his swords in his hands. “I needed that boost.”

Then, Acheron rushed them.

Dream shoved Tommy to the side right as Acheron barreled into him. Dream screamed as Acheron slammed him into the brick, the stone cracking behind his head with the force of Acheron's strength.

Tommy stumbled, barely keeping himself from falling to the ground. He whipped his head back over to Dream and Acheron, and gasped when he saw the hand Acheron had wrapped around Dream's throat.

The most dangerous fact about Acheron wasn't that if he died he would come back to life. It was that dying *made him stronger than before*. A freshly revived Acheron was the equivalent of a living tank. He was insanely strong, fast, and usually pretty damn pissed off.

And right now, a freshly revived Acheron was pinning Dream to the wall and strangling him.

Tommy had to do something. He had to try and help Dream.

Before he could step forward though, he heard someone shout his name.

"Lucid!"

Orpheus was sprinting towards him. Tommy grit his teeth, readying his baton to try and strike at the man. In the distance, Tommy could still see Thanatos lying in a heap of feathers and blood.

Tommy swung his baton. Orpheus went intangible and lunged at him.

Then, everything went black.

...

Later on, Tommy would describe the experience as feeling like those moments when you're both asleep and awake at the same time. You're aware of your body, but only in the vaguest sense. You're not really present.

Distantly, Tommy could hear shouting and the whir of the helicopter blades. There was a dull, aching pain in his side that he couldn't identify. It wasn't strong enough to actually bother him, but it was there. Like a bruise that was being pressed on.

There were voices, but they were muffled, the words completely unintelligible. Almost as if he was being held underwater.

He was himself but he wasn't. He was moving, but he wasn't. He was... He was doing something.

Where was he?

It felt like he was trapped in the darkness for hours, but also seconds. Time didn't pass in that blurry space. Tommy was simply there, existing.

And then, reality came back all at once.

Eyes flying open, Tommy gasped as all his senses came back to him. It was like a bucket of ice water had been dumped on top of him. His ears were ringing, his skin was tingling, and he could feel everything far too much.

Gravel was cutting his palms. The icy wind was biting his arms. There was so much shouting, so much noise.

It was too much. Too much to process. Too much to comprehend.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Tommy curled into a ball as he gasped for air.

What did Dream say to do when he panicked? Count his breathing?

He counted in his head. Four seconds in, eight seconds out.

Four seconds in.

Eight seconds out.

Four seconds in.

Slowly, he readjusted to the world around him. The ringing in his ears faded, and his racing heartbeat slowed with his breathing. He could hear familiar voices shouting behind him. The other heroes. They'd finally showed up.

Opening his eyes though, Tommy gasped at what he saw.

He was kneeling in front of Thanatos. The villain was propped up against the edge of the roof, blood still staining the rocks he was sitting on. There was a hole in his shirt where he'd gotten shot earlier, but there was no wound there anymore. Just freshly healed pink skin.

It was then Tommy realized his hands were still tingling like they usually did after he healed someone. His side was aching as well, in the same place that Thanatos had been shot.

It took Tommy a few moments to piece together what happened.

When he lifted his head and saw Orpheus breathing heavily beside him, clutching at his own side with a pained expression, everything fell into place.

“You fucking possessed me!” Tommy shouted, scrambling backwards to try and get away from the villains.

“I’m sorry! I had to heal him!” Orpheus exclaimed, wincing as he kept a hand on his side. “Jesus fucking Christ though, that hurt like hell!”

Huh. It seemed like since Orpheus had been the one controlling Tommy’s body when he healed Thanatos, he’d been the one to get the brunt of the pain that came with it.

“Yeah, it fucking hurts, doesn’t it?” Tommy snapped, trying to shuffle away from the two villains. Although his head was still spinning, a shiver of disgust crawled up his spine at the

realization that Orpheus had literally *possessed* him. Hopped inside his body and used him like a puppet.

“I’m sorry,” Orpheus repeated, his shoulders relaxing as the pain faded.

For some reason, the apology sounded... genuine. Like Orpheus actually felt bad about possessing Tommy to use his powers.

Tommy frowned. It had to be some kind of act. Or maybe Orpheus was still out of it from the pain. That was probably it.

Before he could think about it further though, Thanatos pushed to his feet, the detonator still sitting in his clawed hand.

“Let’s go help Acheron out,” he told Orpheus.

Orpheus nodded and stood on shaky legs. “Got it.”

Thanatos then glanced down at Tommy, who was still too in shock to try and stand up. “You should probably just hang out here for the rest of the fight. Orpheus’ powers can take a lot out of someone.”

Tommy glared at the man, but he couldn’t find it in himself to disagree. All of his limbs felt like lead, and his head was pounding something fierce. While he usually was tired after healing someone, the fatigue was far worse than usual. Likely a result of the possession.

“Fuck you,” he hissed at the villains.

Thanatos just chuckled at the insult. Meanwhile, Orpheus hesitated, as if he wanted to say something to Tommy.

But then, there was a loud shout from Acheron. Whipping his head back to the fight, Orpheus rushed to follow Thanatos.

Following the two villains with his eyes, Tommy could now see that in the time he had been possessed, the other heroes had indeed arrived. Dream was still standing, dodging Acheron’s swings with surprising grace. Hellion had joined him, disappearing into smoke anytime Acheron tried to land a hit on him, and reappearing on his other side.

Felis was there as well, rushing towards Thanatos and darting out of the way with his cat-like grace when Orpheus lunged for him. While Tommy had never spoken much to the hero who wore a cat mask, he had seen the kind of acrobatic stunts he could pull in the gym, along with his insanely fast reflexes for dodging any hit that came his way. In that sense, he was the perfect match for Orpheus.

So distracted by the fight, Tommy didn’t notice the last hero there until he was right in front of him.

“Lucid! Are you okay?” Gamble asked, dropping to his knees in front of him.

"I'm fine," Tommy said, although his voice was hoarse.

"What happened? I just got here with the others," Gamble explained, reaching out a hand to rest on his shoulder.

Tommy blinked, fighting through the fog that had now descended over his thoughts to remember what had been going on. "Um, Acheron got shot and revived himself. Thanatos got shot too, and Orpheus possessed me to heal him."

Gamble hissed through his teeth, and immediately wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "Fuck man, you've gotta be exhausted. We need to get you out of here."

"No!" Tommy shook his head vehemently. "I can't leave! Not until we get the—"

Tommy was cut off by the sound of an explosion as the roof began to rumble beneath him.

Looking to the edge of the roof, Thanatos stood in his statue pose just like before. This time though, a clawed thumb was now pressing the button in the middle of the detonator.

"Time's up!" Thanatos shouted.

There was another explosion from below. Followed by another, and then another.

Tommy's eyes widened as the entire building began to shake. The fighting came to a standstill.

Acheron shoved past Dream and Hellion to rush for Thanatos. Meanwhile, Orpheus stood frozen, staring at Thanatos in shock.

"You'll see us again soon," Thanatos called, grabbing Acheron's hand and taking off the edge of the roof.

There was a second of silence as everyone watched Thanatos disappear into the shadows.

Then, the ground began to collapse.

The next few moments were a mess of screeching metal and panicked shouts from everyone on the roof. Gamble immediately grabbed Tommy and hauled him to his feet, wrapping arms around his chest and shapeshifting himself a pair of wings.

"NO! There are still civilians inside!" Tommy shouted, struggling in Gamble's arms as they flew away from the building.

Hellion grabbed Dream by the arm, and the two disappeared in a puff of smoke. Then, Felis sprinted to the edge of the roof, jumping across to the next building and landing on a narrow windowsill ledge.

Orpheus stayed on the roof, turning intangible and floating as the ground collapsed underneath him. He watched the heroes run for safety, and Tommy caught his eye as he and Gamble landed on the neighboring building.

It was strange. Despite the fact that he had technically won, Orpheus seemed... tired. Tired and defeated as explosions echoed through the night.

Then, with one final sigh, Orpheus took off in the same direction Thanatos and Acheron had gone, and the sounds of glass shattering and metal screeching fell silent.

Looking down at the building itself, bile rose in Tommy's throat when he saw the blackened brick and glass shards glittering under the streetlights. The roof had caved in on itself, leaving a mountain of concrete chunks in its place.

Fifteen people had just died, and it was their fault.

If Tommy hadn't let Orpheus possess him, Thanatos wouldn't have healed, and wouldn't have detonated the building.

They had failed.

Tommy had failed.

He didn't even register the tears dripping down his cheeks until a familiar pair of arms wrapped around his shoulders. Tommy buried his face into Dream's shoulder as the explosions echoed in his ears.

"It's okay," Dream whispered to him, rubbing a hand up and down his back. "We did our best."

"It's my fault," Tommy confessed in a broken sob. "This is all my fault."

If the Syndicate wasn't looking for him, this wouldn't have happened. If he just got over his fear and told them who he was, fifteen people would still be alive.

Dream tightened the arms he had around Tommy.

"It's not your fault," Dream reminded him. "It's the Syndicate's fault. They're the ones who blew up the building. Not you."

"B-But—"

"No buts. You're a victim. Don't blame yourself for the choices they make," Dream insisted, keeping his voice low enough so the other heroes couldn't hear.

Tommy took a shaky breath to try and steady himself. Dream's words echoed in his mind as he focused on the comforting hand Dream had running up and down his back.

It wasn't his fault. The Syndicate killed those fifteen people. Not him.

The Syndicate were the ones to blame.

Orpheus possessed him. Acheron hurt him. And Thanatos pressed the button to detonate the bombs.

They were the ones to blame.

Anger flickered to life amidst the grief and fear swirling inside of him. Curling his fingers into Dream's jacket, Tommy felt rage burn in his chest the more he thought about the Syndicate.

If they blew up the building because they wanted him, that meant it was Tommy's job to make sure they couldn't hurt anymore people.

Tommy was going to help Dream take them down. No matter what.

Chapter End Notes

like I said before, sometimes when I introduce a hero or villain, I might not tell you guys who they are. that's the case with a new character this chapter :)

stuff is picking up! the syndicate is getting more bold with their moves and it's causing problems for everyone involved so we have fun times ahead

ok now for fun stuff

I have a playlist for this fic! check it out on spotify [here](#)

also I have a discord server! you'll be the first to hear when I post updates and sometimes I send sneak peeks at upcoming stuff so make sure to join
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

please let me know what you thought of the chapter down in the comments! I don't reply to most but I read them all and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

friendly faces

Chapter Summary

The Syndicate go quiet for a while.

Chapter Notes

hey hey people I am back!

first off READ THIS MESSAGE I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

I've been seeing people ask who's who in the comments. I want to remind you all that in the first chapter of this fic, I said in the authors notes that every time I introduce a new character, if I want you to know who they are behind the mask I will say who they are in the end authors notes for the chapter they are introduced in. Please stop asking me in the comments who is who because it's literally in the authors notes. Also please just read the authors notes in general before asking me questions in the comments because like 75% of the time the answer is already in there.

anyway that aside, as always thank you so much for all the love you've given this fic so far, this chapter definitely fought me a bit at times because I'm being very hard on myself with pacing at the moment. I have so much stuff I want to get to, but I'm trying to force myself to take my time to properly build everything up but it's hardddd

however though I do really like the way this chapter turned out in the end! hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Waking up with a gasp, Tommy clutched his bedsheets, the remnants from his dream slipping through his fingers like water.

He'd had another memory dream. He wasn't sure how he knew that it was a memory, he just did.

There was still no face he could see. But he remembered small details.

A wide smile.

A flash of brown hair.

A laugh that echoed through his chest.

A chin resting on his head, and warm arms draped over his shoulders.

The figure in his dreams had been familiar. Oh so achingly familiar. Even though Tommy didn't see his face or hear his voice, even though he wouldn't have been able to give the figure a name, one word kept playing on repeat in Tommy's mind.

Brother.

Tommy had never had real siblings. He'd been dropped on the doorstep of a hospital when he was a baby, and grew up in the foster system. Sure, he'd had foster siblings, but they'd never actually cared for him like Tommy thought siblings were supposed to care for each other. He was a stranger in every house he lived in, constantly feeling like he was intruding on something private. Like he was at a party and the host wanted him to leave, but was too polite to say anything.

So eventually, Tommy had left. He'd run from the foster system. Sure, he got dragged back a few times, but he soon figured out how not to get caught.

Sleeping in alleyways and abandoned buildings. Pickpocketing the wealthy people who came out of jewelry stores. Being wary of anyone who looked at him for more than five seconds. It had been a lonely life, but it was his. No one could tell him what to do or where to live. He was free, and that was what made it worth it.

Tommy had been alone.

So who was the brother he kept seeing in his dreams?

There was no answer to be found in his head, just the lingering echo of that laugh. In a way, it almost felt mocking.

After he stared at his bedsheets for a few minutes, fingers twisting in the soft white fabric, he finally grabbed his phone off the nightstand to check the time.

It was morning. A bit earlier than when he usually got up, but not early enough to justify going back to sleep.

Something dripped onto his phone screen. Frowning, Tommy brought a hand up to his cheek and realized he'd been crying in his sleep. Again. This was becoming an annoying habit of his.

Furiously wiping at his cheeks with his hands, Tommy stumbled to his feet and made his way out of his room. He beelined for the bathroom, closing the door so he could splash his face with water before Dream saw the tear tracks on his face.

A few minutes later, Tommy padded out to the kitchen. The wood was cold against his feet, and he quietly regretted not putting on socks before he left his room.

Dream was already sitting at the dining table. His mask was pushed up to show his mouth, and he had a plate of eggs and toast sitting in front of him.

“Morning Tommy,” Dream mumbled as he walked over to the table. “I put your food in the microwave to keep the flies off it.”

Tommy smiled. Even though it wasn’t unusual for Dream to make him breakfast, it was still a small kindness that always took him by surprise. “Thanks Dream,” he said, heading over to the kitchen and opening the microwave.

After grabbing his eggs and toast, Tommy also poured himself a mug of coffee from the coffee pot that was sitting in front of the window. Looking out over the skyline, Tommy could see a roiling sea of white clouds blanketing the city. In the distance, darker clouds brewed, and Tommy wondered if they were going to get another storm.

Fitting. In a way, the Syndicate was like that brewing storm. Sitting quietly in the distance, lying in wait as they came closer and closer to unleashing hell on the entirety of L’Manberg.

It had been a few days since the explosion incident had happened. Since then, the Syndicate had gone back to laying under the radar, but the heroes knew it was only a matter of time before they decided to strike yet again. And Tommy knew they were all terrified for what the Syndicate might have planned next.

Sitting back down at the table, Tommy began to dig into his breakfast, shoveling the perfectly salted eggs into his mouth and washing it down with sips of coffee.

“Did you sleep well?” Dream asked after a few moments, piling some of the eggs on top of his toast.

Tommy shrugged. “It was alright.”

Humming, Dream took a bite of the toast, and Tommy could feel his gaze lingering on him while he chewed. “You look tired. Your eyes are all red.”

Shrinking back in his chair, Tommy dropped his head to look at his plate. “I’m fine. Just had a weird dream.”

At this, Dream cocked his head to the side, and made a questioning noise. “Oh?”

Tommy squirmed in his seat. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to tell Dream about the revelation he’d had. So far, Dream seemed to be of the opinion that Tommy should just let himself move on from his lost memories, and he didn’t want to get another lecture on how his amnesia was actually a blessing.

But he’d already admitted he had a weird dream, and Dream was going to want to know more.

“It... It was kind of a memory,” Tommy admitted softly, pushing the eggs around his plate with his fork. “Nothing concrete, but I could kind of see someone with me.”

“Who?” Dream asked, leaning forward in his seat. “Did you see what they looked like?”

Tommy shook his head. “Not really. I think he had brown hair, but that was about it.”

“Who was he though? Did you remember a name?”

That was surprising. Tommy had thought Dream would brush the whole dream off, not ask Tommy for more details.

“I don’t know his name, but I think... I think I know who he was to me.”

“Go on,” Dream said, setting his fork down.

Swallowing the nerves down, Tommy forced himself to look up and meet Dream’s smiling mask. “I think he was my brother.”

A beat of silence hung heavily in the air between them. Nerves buzzed in Tommy’s chest like bees, his eyes darting around Dream’s blank smiling face to try and figure out what he was thinking. It was a pointless effort, because Dream was always unreadable. But Tommy still tried nonetheless.

Finally, after a moment, Dream leaned back in his chair.

“I didn’t know you had a brother,” he said, his tone betraying no hint of emotion.

“I didn’t know either,” Tommy admitted, wringing his hands together. “I don’t- I don’t really know how I know that. But I think he’s the one who took me in that year. The person who got me off the streets.”

Another silence. Dream stared at Tommy for a moment, arms folded over his chest.

“I hate to say it, but your brother must not have cared for you very much, considering there’s no one looking for you right now,” Dream told him.

The words were like a punch to the gut.

“But-”

“Tommy, if I was your brother and you went missing, the first thing I would’ve done was file a missing person’s report for you,” Dream explained, his voice carrying a hint of gentleness to it that it hadn’t before. “I would be out on the streets every day searching for you. I’d be putting up missing posters on every street corner, I’d go door to door asking people if they’d seen you, I would stop at *nothing* to find you.”

Tears burned in Tommy’s eyes. Dream was right. If his brother really had been a brother to him, he would want to look for Tommy, right?

“I guess you’re right,” Tommy mumbled, fighting to push the tears back down.

"I wish I could say something to make you feel better, but the only other explanation I can think of might actually be worse," Dream said, lips pressed into a thin line.

Sniffling a bit, Tommy met Dream's blank mask again. "What's the other explanation?"

"I mean, you were kidnapped by the Syndicate, and I doubt they would've wanted someone looking around for you," he started, tapping his fingers along the edge of the table. "It's possible that when they took you, they might have... gotten rid of your brother."

No.

No, that couldn't be true.

Tommy's eyes widened as dread curled in his gut. That had to be it. Even though Tommy couldn't remember a damn thing about the man who must've been a brother to him, he knew deep down that he wouldn't just forget about Tommy if he disappeared.

He had been loved. Loved like he never had before. It was just something he knew in his bones.

So the only explanation for why no one was looking for him was that Tommy's brother was dead.

"Oh god," Tommy whispered, unable to keep the tears from falling down his cheeks now. "They-They killed him, didn't they?"

"It makes a lot more sense than just saying this man who took you in didn't care about you," Dream told him softly. "I'm so sorry, Tommy."

A sob tore from his throat, and Tommy immediately brought his knees up to his chest to hide his face in them. His brother was dead and he couldn't even remember what he looked like. Finally, Tommy had found someone who loved him, he'd found a *family*, only for the Syndicate to tear it away from him.

There was a warm hand on his back, and Tommy realized Dream had gotten up and was standing next to his chair now. Tommy leaned into Dream's side, and Dream crouched down to hug him properly.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," Dream whispered, hugging him tightly as Tommy sobbed into his shoulder.

"I-I can't even remember his name," Tommy cried, his voice muffled by Dream's sweatshirt. "They took everything from me!"

"I know, I know," Dream shushed him, his chin resting on Tommy's hair. "You don't deserve this, Tommy."

"I just- I finally had a family," Tommy pushed, hiccuping a bit now. "But now he's dead and I don't even know what he looked like!"

"It's not fair, I know," Dream told him, running a hand up and down his back again. "But you're not helpless anymore. We're going to make the Syndicate pay for what they did to you and your brother."

It felt like there was a cavern where Tommy's chest should be. He was mourning someone he didn't even know, and it was somehow the most painful thing he'd ever experienced.

Yet Dream's words sparked something in him. Something to fill the empty cavern of grief that was threatening to swallow him whole.

The flames of anger were flickering to life inside of him. Because this was all the Syndicate's fault. They were the ones who killed his brother. They were the reason he lost his memories in the first place. They were the reason he lost his family in every way you could lose someone.

"I want to take them down," Tommy whispered into Dream's sweatshirt, the words rough with his tears.

Dream hummed, and it sounded approving. "We will, Tommy. I'll make sure of it."

And despite the tears still racing down his cheeks, Tommy found himself smiling.



After that, Tommy trained harder than he ever had before.

His body was constantly painted with streaks of purple, brown, and green. His muscles ached every time he so much as stood up. His exhaustion had reached a new level, and he'd often pass out on his bed before he even got the chance to take his shoes off.

But he got better. His dodging got better, and so did his hits. More often than not, he found himself landing hits on Dream's arms and legs, and although he never beat Dream outright in a fight, he started making the man sweat.

One day, Tommy asked Dream if he could start using a sword like he did.

He wasn't sure what he wanted it for. If he would actually try to stab a member of the Syndicate if he got the chance. He didn't even know if he was capable of something like that. But it was something he couldn't stop thinking about.

So he asked. Dream said no, and Tommy wasn't sure if he was disappointed or relieved.

Soon, Dream started letting Tommy go to the gym on his own. He made sure Tommy knew what he could and couldn't tell the other heroes, and made him swear to keep his mask on at all times. Tommy agreed to all of it, because he knew he couldn't let the other heroes find out where he came from.

One day, Tommy found himself in the gym again. While he used to dread working out, the more he did it, the more he found it was actually something he could enjoy when he wasn't getting the shit beaten out of him. Sometimes, his head got a bit too loud. Thoughts of the

Syndicate would intermingle with the few flashes of memories he was still seeing in his dreams, and the mix of anger and grief would swirl inside of him until he wanted nothing more than to scream his lungs out into a pillow.

Instead of screaming though, Tommy would go to the gym. Today he was using one of those fancy treadmills, the kind that had a screen in it so you could watch videos while you ran.

Tommy wasn't watching anything though. He had 'borrowed' some earbuds from Dream a while back (meaning he just stole them outright and Dream never noticed), and was using them to listen to some random playlist he'd found.

The songs were nice. Fairly upbeat with cool guitar riffs here and there. While Tommy was still trying to figure out his music taste, he figured out he really liked indie rock, and was trying to listen to more stuff in that genre.

Sweat was beading across his forehead. His heart pumped in his chest, a quick but steady *thump thump thump*. The muscles in his legs were warm, and he bopped his head along to the beat of the song playing in his ears.

Then, the song ended. The next one came on, and Tommy almost fell off the treadmill as soon as he heard the opening notes.

There wasn't anything unique about this song. It was just another in the long line of songs this random person on Youtube had put together for people to listen to. But Tommy... Tommy had heard this song before.

"Hey, you should listen to this. I think you'd really like it," his brother's voice echoed in his ears.

It was a memory. Tommy couldn't pin a specific moment—no glimpses of a face or specific place he was at when that conversation happened—but he could hear the voice telling him to listen to that song all the same.

And then, as quickly as it came, the voice faded from his head again. Tommy thought he might have an accent similar to his own, but he wasn't sure. Once again, the memory was slipping through his fingers, dissipating into smoke as soon as it formed a solid picture.

He turned the treadmill off. Panting to try and catch his breath, Tommy listened to the song all the way through, and realized he could mouth the lyrics perfectly.

When the song ended, Tommy rewound the video so he could listen to it again. Still gasping for air, Tommy sat down at the top of the treadmill, burying his face in his knees as he curled his hands into fists.

He hated this. He hated this so much. It was like his own mind was taunting him—giving him only the smallest of glimpses at the life he once had, before ripping the memories away from him just as quickly.

His heartbeat returned to its normal rhythm. He rewound the song again when it ended, but didn't get through his third listen before someone interrupted him.

"Lucid, you okay?"

Glancing up, Tommy blinked when he noticed Gamble standing next to the treadmill. Despite the clown mask covering his features, Tommy could practically feel the worry radiating off the hero, and realized how odd it probably looked to see Tommy curled up on a treadmill with earbuds on.

Tugging the earbuds out, Tommy scrambled to his feet. "Um, yeah, I'm fine. Just got dizzy for a second," he lied.

Gamble considered him for a moment. "You've been in here a lot more than usual. Are you sure you're not overworking yourself?"

"No, I'm fine," Tommy said, brushing off the concern with a wave of his hand. "I've just been slacking off on training so I'm trying to make up for it."

"Slacking off? The fuck are you talking about?" Gamble scoffed, leaning against the arm of the treadmill. "You weren't slacking off before. Dream had you in here multiple times a week. Now you're here pretty much every day. How the hell are you not exhausted, man?"

Well, Tommy *was* exhausted, but it wasn't a bad thing.

"You've seen how batshit the Syndicate is getting, Gamble. We need to up our game if we want to make sure people don't get hurt like last time," Tommy snapped, wondering if everyone had just forgotten about the building incident.

Gamble paused at that. "Lucid, that wasn't your fault. That wasn't anyone's fault."

"It was though," Tommy told him, wrapping his arms around himself. "If I hadn't let Orpheus possess me he wouldn't have healed Thanatos, and Thanatos wouldn't have been able to detonate the building."

"Hadn't let- Jesus Christ, Lucid, are you even hearing yourself? How the fuck are you supposed to fight back against getting fucking possessed?" Gamble asked. "Hell, I'm surprised the place hadn't gotten blown up before Thanatos pressed the detonator! All the hostages were being kept in a single room, and if any of them tried to leave it would set off the bombs anyway."

Tommy clenched his jaw. He wanted to argue, because he knew it was his fault. At least partially. He could've done better. He *should* have done better. People died because of him, and that was something he had to live with now. It wasn't something he should just brush aside.

But there was logic in Gamble's argument. Tommy hadn't heard of anyone being able to fight back against Orpheus' possession before. Even if he had been prepared, logically there was nothing he could've done.

Even if the rational side of his mind knew this though, it didn't feel like the truth.

"It doesn't matter either way. People died, and I don't want to let it happen again," Tommy scoffed, turning to switch the treadmill back on.

A hand caught his wrist before he could press the button though.

"No, you need to take a break," Gamble told him.

The frown on Tommy's mask perfectly matched his hidden expression in that moment. "I just had one."

Gamble huffed, and Tommy somehow knew he was rolling his eyes. "Nah, I mean like a real break. C'mon, have you even had lunch yet?"

"Yeah, I had a sandwich before I came down here," Tommy answered.

"And how long ago was that?"

There was a beat of hesitation as Tommy squirmed under the shapeshifter's invisible gaze. "A few hours ago."

Snorting like he'd expected this answer, Gamble tugged on Tommy's wrist, trying to get him off the treadmill. "Alright, we're going to the communal kitchen."

"Wh- I'm fine! I'm not hungry!" Tommy said, trying to pull his wrist out of Gamble's grip.

Gamble ignored his attempts at escape, and continued to drag him towards the doors to the gym. "Well then you can keep me company while I eat, because I know that I'm starving."

The thing was, Gamble wasn't terribly strong. If Tommy wanted, he could probably yank his wrist out of Gamble's fingers with ease. He knew that if he actually snapped at the man, actually told him to fuck off, that Gamble would most likely listen.

That's what he should do. That's what Dream would want him to do. He had told Tommy that it was risky to even let himself get close to the other heroes. Tommy could slip up so easily, and then the whole facade Dream had built around Lucid would shatter.

But... Tommy couldn't find it in himself to pull away. He told himself it was just because he was actually a bit hungry, but deep down, he knew that wasn't the truth. The fact of the matter was that Gamble was kind. Unusually so. He had clearly been paying attention to how much Tommy was training, he comforted him about the bombing, and he was worried he wasn't properly taking care of himself.

It was just so easy to stop fighting with himself when Gamble showed up. To go along with whatever the hero said.

Maybe he wanted to talk to Gamble more.

Maybe he just wanted to talk to someone besides Dream for once.

So Tommy stopped fighting and let himself be pulled to the kitchen.

Outside the gym, there was a long hallway that stretched between the elevators and different types of training facilities. There was the standard gym, there was the fighting room lined with mats, and there were a few power-proof rooms where heroes could push their abilities as far as they could go without having to worry about destroying anything.

Then, at the opposite end of the hall, there was the communal kitchen. The only times Tommy had been in there was when he and Dream ran out of water during training, and Dream had Tommy go run to get them more. It was a large kitchen with shining stone countertops, stainless steel appliances, and a huge floor to ceiling window that overlooked a busy street corner.

As Gamble dragged Tommy inside the kitchen, he pointed at a small table next to the window and gestured for Tommy to sit there. He did as he was told, and watched as Gamble hurried over to the fridge and began to dig through the contents.

The kitchen was completely empty at the moment. That wasn't surprising. It was a quiet day in the Tower, and many heroes were taking the time to decompress. Or if they weren't decompressing, then they were researching, like Dream was doing. Researching the Syndicate, trying to figure out what their next move would be. It was more of a guessing game than anything else, but Dream had admitted to Tommy he at least wanted to feel like he was doing something instead of just twiddling his thumbs, so Tommy had left him to it.

"Oh fuck yeah! Hellion left his burrito in here!" Gamble cheered, taking out a foil wrapped burrito and putting it on the counter next to him. "Yo Lucid, there's also some leftover pizza from when Felis ordered Dominoes the other day. You want a slice?"

"Um, what kind is it?"

"Just pepperoni and cheese," Gamble shrugged.

Tommy frowned behind his mask. Pizza sounded *really* good right now. Especially pepperoni pizza. But could he just take food from the fridge without asking?

"Will Felis be pissed that I ate his pizza?" Tommy asked, wringing his hands together.

Gamble snorted. "Dude, he hasn't touched this thing in two days. I think he forgot it's even in here. Besides, everyone knows when you leave food in the communal fridge that means it's fair game. If you don't want other people taking your food, then you bring it back to your apartment."

Everyone knew that?

"Well, no one told me that," Tommy mumbled, embarrassment rushing through him. "I'll, uh, have a slice then I guess."

"Sounds good. You want it hot or cold?" Gamble asked, taking out two slices and putting them on a paper plate.

“I don’t care,” Tommy shrugged.

Nodding, Gamble opened the microwave and popped the pizza slices inside. Tommy watched as he then took out another paper plate from the cabinet, unwrapping his half-eaten burrito from its foil and wrapping it in a paper towel instead.

The microwave dinged. Gamble switched out the pizza for the burrito, and the microwave hummed to life a second time.

Opening the fridge again, Gamble took out a bottle of water. Then he picked up the plate with the pizza, and walked over to the table Tommy was sitting at, setting the plate and the water bottle both in front of him.

Before Tommy could say anything, the microwave dinged a second time. Gamble rushed over and pulled his burrito out, before grabbing his own water bottle and returning to the table.

He sat down across from Tommy, steam curling from the burrito and over his mask.

“Thanks,” Tommy mumbled, stomach growling as he stared at his food.

“It’s no problem, man. If you’re gonna be working out all the time like you’re fucking G.I. Joe or some shit, you gotta make sure you’re eating plenty,” Gamble told him as he reached up for his mask.

Tommy expected Gamble to just lift his mask up enough to show his mouth so he could eat, like how Dream did it. But instead, Gamble began to pull the mask all the way off his face, and Tommy immediately stiffened.

“Uh, are you sure you should- um, should I look away or-”

Gamble paused, the mask now high enough to reveal his mouth and nose. “Oh, I’m not worried about you seeing my face.” Without the mask covering his mouth, his voice changer was no longer in effect, and Tommy realized Gamble’s voice was a lot higher than he expected it to be.

His voice was also... familiar?

No, that couldn’t be right. Tommy shook his head to clear that thought.

“Are you sure?” Tommy asked, furrowing his brows. “Because I’m not gonna- I mean, I don’t really like to show my face.”

“That’s fine,” Gamble shrugged. “I’m not trying to invade your privacy, man. But I’m fine with you seeing what I look like.”

And then, before Tommy could say anything else, Gamble was pulling off the clown mask and Tommy saw a hero’s face for the first time.

Gamble was a lot younger than Tommy expected him to be. A *lot* younger. Like, he was only in his early twenties at most. His hair was dark and nearly fell to his shoulders, with a dark blue beanie shoved on top. His eyes were an equally dark shade of brown, but had a surprising amount of warmth in them. Then, he smiled at Tommy, and Tommy realized his smile was exactly how he'd imagined it under the mask.

"I know, I'm so devastatingly handsome it's a bit of a shock when people see me for the first time," Gamble teased with a wry grin.

"You're young," Tommy said instead of responding to that.

Gamble shrugged, picking up his burrito and biting into it. "Speak for yourself, kid."

Tommy stiffened at this. "The fuck do you mean by that?" There was no way Gamble could've figured out he was a minor. He'd never seen Tommy's face, or even heard his actual voice. How the hell would he know if he's a kid?

"Relax, I'm not making fun of you for it," Gamble said, holding his hands up in mock surrender. "But c'mon, I'm not an idiot. It's not hard to tell you're young. You've gotta be, what, eighteen? Nineteen at most?"

Oh thank god. That nearly gave him a heart attack.

"None of your business," Tommy muttered, although the hostility was gone from his voice now that he knew Gamble hadn't figured out the small fact about him that could get him kicked from the Heroes.

"So eighteen then," Gamble huffed, smirking at him.

Tommy stayed silent. It was close enough anyway.

This lack of reaction just made Gamble laugh more, and Tommy scowled as he lifted his mask up just a bit to take a bite of his pizza.

The two went quiet for a few minutes as they ate their food. Tommy wasn't going to speak with his mask not covering his mouth, while Gamble was too focused on his burrito to hold a one-sided conversation. The pizza itself was pretty good. Of course, it had that refrigerator taste that all leftovers had after spending a few days in there, but heating it up had helped mask the taste just a tiny bit.

The cheese was melty, the pepperoni was subtly spicy, and Tommy hadn't realized until now just how hungry he was. Even though he had only asked for one slice, Gamble had given him two, and he was ridiculously glad for that now.

After finishing his first slice, he paused to take a sip of water. Then, something Gamble had said earlier clicked in his head, and he immediately slid his mask down so he could speak again.

"Wait, didn't you say that was Hellion's burrito?" Tommy asked, pointing at the burrito in Gamble's hands.

Glancing down, Gamble nodded and took another bite.

“Isn’t that a little gross?” Tommy pushed. “You could, like, swap germs with him or something.”

At this, Gamble had to cover his mouth as he chuckled. He shook his head as he finished chewing his food, before swallowing and grinning at him.

“Trust me, there are a lot of other ways I could get Hellion’s germs outside of eating his leftovers,” Gamble told him, like there was some kind of inside joke there Tommy wasn’t getting.

What the fuck did that even mean?

While Tommy was tempted to ask, he also had a feeling he didn’t really want to know the answer to that. So he stayed quiet, and lifted his mask up again to start eating his second slice.

Once Gamble had completely finished his burrito, it didn’t take long for Tommy to finish his pizza. He took a few gulps of his water as Gamble slid his mask back over his face, and then both of them stood up from the table, moving to clean up.

“Lucid, can I ask you something?” Gamble said as he stuffed his paper plate into the trash.

“Shoot.”

Brushing his hands off on his pants, Gamble then folded his arms over his chest, and looked Tommy up and down. “I heard about what happened with Hellion. Why don’t you want anyone to see what you look like?”

Tommy tensed at the question. “I don’t want people knowing my identity,” he snapped, taking a step back. “Isn’t that enough?”

“Of course it is. I’m not asking you to tell me who you are,” Gamble said, holding his hands up in mock surrender. “But I’m just curious about why Dream is allowed to know who you are, and no one else is.”

There was a beat as Tommy thought over his words, trying to find the best way to word his response without raising any suspicions.

“I mean, he’s the one who recruited me to be his sidekick in the first place, so obviously he knows who I am,” Tommy shrugged, struggling to keep his tone even.

“How did he find you? From what I’ve heard, you weren’t in any kind of training program.”

Shit. Tommy really needed to get out of this conversation while he could.

“He was out patrolling one night and I saw him get hurt, so I helped him,” Tommy lied, grimacing behind his mask.

“Really? How long ago was that?” Gamble pushed, taking a step towards him.

“A few months ago,” Tommy shot back. Gamble was silent for a bit, as if he wasn’t pleased by that answer, so Tommy continued. “If you need an exact fucking date I can go look in my diary to cross-reference it for you,” he snapped, his tone biting.

“You keep a diary?” Gamble questioned.

“Wh- No, I was being sarcastic,” Tommy scoffed, shaking his head. “What is this though, twenty fucking questions? You feed me and then interrogate me?”

“Hey man, I don’t mean to come across as pushy. I was just curious,” Gamble reassured.

“Dream just never seemed like the type to pick up a sidekick, and when he suddenly gets one out of nowhere like you and no one knows anything about you, people start to wonder.”

Tommy’s jaw clenched. “What are you wondering about me?”

“I’m more of a wait and see type guy instead of one to jump to wild theories,” Gamble explained, stepping back again. “You’re just interesting to me, Lucid. But if you don’t want me to go poking around, I won’t. We all have our secrets.”

There was something strange in Gamble’s voice when he said that. The silent implication was loud and clear. He had a secret of his own, just like Tommy had his secrets.

But Tommy didn’t want to find out what Gamble’s secret was. He just wanted to get out of this conversation.

“I’m gonna head back to my place,” Tommy said, brushing past Gamble as he headed out of the kitchen. “Thanks for the food.”

“No problem, kid,” Gamble said, waving as he headed out.

Tommy ignored the wave, just as he ignored the anxiety buzzing in his chest as he thought over how Gamble was far more perceptive than he gave the man credit for.

While Gamble was kind, he was also dangerous. Tommy knew this now.

He’d have to make sure he didn’t forget it.



The cool night wind blew through Tommy’s hair, ruffling his curls and making him grateful for the thick hoodie he had pulled over his head.

It was a patrol night. Ever since the Syndicate had crashed the fundraiser, patrols had been delegated more to the lower-ranked heroes, so the top ten could focus on being prepared in case a surprise attack came. However, they were all getting restless in the Tower, so when Dream suggested they take a patrol around Prime Heights, Tommy immediately ran to grab his mask.

Now they were strolling down the perfectly paved sidewalks, eyeing the expensive homes lit up by warm, golden light and searching for any sign of strange activity.

It's not like they were expecting anything to happen. Prime Heights rarely saw action, because there were already so many heroes patrolling the area that petty criminals didn't even bother. Sometimes a villain might crop up here and there, but it was rare for them to actually be doing anything besides passing through.

It felt good to get outside the Hero Tower again. To breathe in the rich, fragrant flowers that decorated the front lawns of the mansions on the street. To feel the crisp air on the back of his neck. To hear his boots thumping against the asphalt in time with Dream's.

It was nice, and maybe that's why Tommy wasn't as alert as he should've been. Prime Heights was supposed to be quiet. This was more of a casual walk for him and Dream. They weren't supposed to actually run into anyone.

But of course, nothing could go Tommy's way like that. It just wasn't in his cards.

They turned down a street away from the glowing mansions and towards the shopping district nearby. Everyone was asleep this late at night, so Tommy and Dream were walking in the middle of the road, having only seen one car driving this entire patrol. In the distance, Tommy could make out the faint light from the sign for an organic grocery store. Tommy had never been in one of those fancy grocery stores, but they always looked so clean and high-end. It was a shame they were closed at this hour. If they hadn't, he might've asked Dream if they could go in and get a snack.

It happened in the span of Tommy blinking. One second, the road in front of them was empty. The next second, a familiar figure was outlined by the orange glow of the streetlights.

"Orpheus," Dream breathed, holding out a hand to stop Tommy from walking.

Tommy stiffened, hand immediately moving to the baton on his hip as his head whipped around. Orpheus never showed up alone, so if he was here, that meant Acheron or Thanatos had to be somewhere nearby.

Orpheus' trench coat billowed behind him in the breeze, the dark makeup under his eyes glittering in the faint light. "No need to get all jumpy. It's only me tonight."

"What do you want?" Dream asked, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword. "Wouldn't think you'd be so eager to face me again so soon."

"I know this might be shocking for you to hear, but I'm not actually here to talk to you," Orpheus told him, smirking as he shoved his hands in the pockets of his trench coat.

Tommy's heart leapt into his throat as Dream immediately stepped in front of him. While Orpheus might have been referring to someone he was supposed to meet, or some other reason he might be in the area, judging by the way he was looking at Tommy he doubted that was the case.

"Going after the sidekick? That's a new low, even for you," Dream scoffed, unsheathing the sword completely.

Orpheus rolled his eyes, but didn't respond as he disappeared in another blink.

Fuck. He was invisible.

"Lucid, get behind me," Dream ordered, grabbing Tommy's shoulder and tugging him close to his back. The two of them were spinning around in a circle, waiting for Orpheus to pop up any second now.

With his blood roaring in his ears, Tommy pressed himself against Dream. His breathing was stuttering and his hands were shaking. What the hell did Orpheus want with him? Had he figured out who Tommy was? But that was impossible!

"Do you see him?" Dream whispered.

"No, do you?" Tommy asked, risking a glance back at his mentor.

Dream shook his head. "No, I think-"

He cut off before he could finish his sentence. Suddenly, Dream stiffened, and Tommy staggered away as he watched the faint shadow of Orpheus rush into Dream.

The sword clattered to the ground. Dream stumbled a few steps forward, shaking his head and looking around as if he was confused as to where he was. Then, the beady eyes of the smiling face landed on Tommy, and he straightened up.

"Well shit, that was easier than I thought," Dream said. Except... it didn't sound like Dream.

It was Dream's voice, still altered by his voice changer in the way Tommy had become so familiar with over the past few months. But his words now lilted with an accent more similar to Tommy's than his own.

No, it wasn't just similar to Tommy's accent. It was identical to Orpheus' accent.

Even though Tommy couldn't see Dream's eyes, he knew that if he could, they would be a foggy white right now. Because as 'Dream' brushed himself off and took a step towards Tommy, Tommy knew that his mentor wasn't actually the one standing in front of him.

Orpheus had possessed Dream.

"What the fuck, Orpheus?!" Tommy screeched, whipping out his baton and pointing it at his possessed mentor. "What the hell do you want with me?!"

Fuck. Shit. This was bad. This was really bad. If Dream was possessed, that meant Tommy was essentially alone with Orpheus. He was alone with a Syndicate member, which meant Dream couldn't protect him.

Tommy wanted to throw up.

"Lucid, relax, I'm not gonna hurt you," Orpheus reassured him, holding Dream's hands up in mock surrender. "I just wanted a second to talk to you."

Stumbling backwards, Tommy scowled at the villain. "Why the hell did you have to possess Dream to do that?!"

"I wanted to talk to you *alone*. Without your babysitter listening in," Orpheus explained, not making any moves towards him. "He never leaves you alone when you two are out. This was the only way I could think to talk to you one on one."

"The fuck do you even want to talk to me about?" Tommy snapped, struggling to keep the waver out of his voice. "I'm not important. I'm just a sidekick."

"Look, just put the baton down, and we can have a chill chat for five minutes. Then I'll hop out of Dream's body and be on my merry way."

Tommy scoffed. "Yeah fucking right. Like I'm falling for that."

Sighing, Orpheus dropped his hands but didn't make any moves to grab the sword on the ground. "Fine, you can keep the baton. But I'm not looking for a fight, and I don't think you are either."

He should be. If their roles were reversed, and Tommy was being possessed by Orpheus, Dream would've already started attacking him. He would hit him over and over until Orpheus was forced to leave Tommy's body. That's what Dream would want Tommy to do. He would want Tommy to get Orpheus out of his body as fast as possible.

But even though Tommy knew Dream wasn't aware of what was going on right now, the very idea of actually trying to hurt his mentor... it wasn't something he thought he could do. If he slammed Orpheus into a wall, Dream would be the one who had to deal with that bruise. If he made Orpheus bleed, Dream would be the one stuck with bandaging it up. If he hurt Orpheus right now, he hurt Dream. Tommy didn't have the stomach to do that.

Besides, Orpheus wasn't a fighter. Tommy knew this. If the man said he was just there to talk, Tommy was inclined to believe him.

"Fine," Tommy bit out, dropping his baton to his side. "What the hell do you want to talk to me about?"

Orpheus' shoulders slumped in relief. "Okay, I'll make this quick. I want to know what the fuck is going on with you, Lucid."

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "Care to elaborate?"

"Don't act like you don't know what I mean," Orpheus scoffed, and it was still strange hearing Dream speak with Orpheus' accent. "Nothing about you makes sense, Lucid. You appeared out of nowhere a few months ago as Dream's sidekick. We all thought this meant you had to have some really insanely powerful ability. Something we hadn't seen before. But you're just a healer. And while healers are great to have, they're not that uncommon to find

around. Not to mention, you have one of the worst drawbacks to healing I've ever seen. No one is that desperate for a healer to put someone through the kind of pain you do. Especially not a hero."

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

"That's not a question," Tommy snapped, curling his hands into fists.

"I just... I want to know *why*," Orpheus explained, reaching up as if to push his hair back, but pausing when his fingers hit the porcelain of Dream's mask instead. "Why do you do this for Dream? Why are you loyal to him? What does he have over you?"

"He's not fucking blackmailing me if that's what you're implying," Tommy said, glaring at Orpheus.

"Really? Because it just—" Orpheus paused, taking a breath to steady himself. "I've only met one other person who had the ability to heal with the same drawback as you. Who would feel the pain of the wound as if it were his own."

Tommy couldn't breathe. He knew. He had to know.

When Tommy didn't reply, Orpheus continued.

"I have a theory about who you might be under that mask, Lucid," he admitted softly, something pained lining his words. "Acheron and Thanatos think I'm crazy. It makes sense in a lot of ways, but it also doesn't make any sense at all. You can't be him, I don't- I can't even fathom how that would've happened if my theory is right." He paused, taking a shaky breath as if he was holding back tears. "I hope I'm wrong though. I hope that it's all just a weird coincidence and you're some random guy Dream picked up off the street because if I'm right... I just- I don't even know. None of it would make sense anymore."

For some reason, hearing Orpheus on the verge of tears made Tommy want to cry as well. He sounded so genuinely *upset* as he spoke of who he thought Tommy might be. Like it was heartbreakingly to even consider.

"You're definitely wrong," Tommy said, although he sounded far more uncertain than he wanted to. "If you think I'm someone you once knew, you're fucking wrong. You're a monster, Orpheus. A monster who hurts innocent people for no goddamn reason. I stay far away from people like that."

They killed his brother. Tommy had to remind himself of that. No matter how sad Orpheus sounded, Tommy couldn't let himself feel sympathy for someone like him. Not when he was partially responsible for Tommy losing everything.

The full body flinch Orpheus made at that almost made Tommy stagger back.

"I didn't think we'd actually blow up the building," Orpheus confessed, barely speaking above a whisper. "I just thought it was a bluff. That if it actually came down to it, we'd just leave. But I should know better by now that Acheron and Thanatos don't bluff, and it was

stupid of me to think otherwise.” He shook his head, folding his arms over his chest. “But you’re right, Lucid. You can’t be the person I’m thinking of. I’m just throwing anything at the wall at this point to see if it sticks.”

Tommy watched as Orpheus took another step back, before kneeling on the ground.

“I’m sorry to have wasted your time,” Orpheus apologized. “I’m going to leave Dream now. Just tell him he got possessed and you fought me off. I made a few snarky comments and then said I had somewhere to be before I disappeared.”

“Why would I lie for you?” Tommy asked, furrowing his brows.

“Because I don’t think Dream would be too happy to find out you had a civil conversation with a villain and didn’t try to fight me off,” Orpheus explained calmly. “You’re not like him, Lucid. No matter how hard you try to be a mini Dream, that’s just not who you are.”

And before Tommy could even try to think of a response to that, suddenly Dream slumped forward, and Tommy only got a glimpse of Orpheus as he sprinted down the street, away from the heroes.

Tommy watched him go, his dark coat flaring out behind him before he disappeared into thin air. There was something tight in his chest after their talk, and even as Dream came back to awareness, Tommy couldn’t stop thinking about the villain.

“Lucid?” Dream asked in a hoarse voice, back to speaking in his own accent. “The fuck just happened?”

Staring at the spot where Orpheus disappeared for just a moment longer, Tommy realized he had a choice. He could either tell Dream the truth about what had happened when Orpheus possessed him, or he could repeat the lie Orpheus gave him.

He should tell the truth. That was the kind of thing Dream would definitely want Tommy to tell him, so he could know that the Syndicate was suspicious of Tommy’s identity.

But as he forced himself to turn back to Dream, to ignore the tightness that wasn’t going away even as the seconds passed on, he found himself repeating the lie without thinking twice.

“Orpheus possessed you, but I managed to fight him off. I don’t think he really wanted anything except to piss me off,” Tommy explained, resting a hand on his mentor’s back.

“Are you sure?” Dream asked, grabbing Tommy’s hand and squeezing it tight. “He didn’t try anything with you?”

“No, it’s okay. He doesn’t suspect anything,” Tommy reassured him, the lie tasting bitter on his tongue.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Dream reached his other hand up to cup the side of Tommy’s mask. “That’s good. You did really good, Tommy. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to stop that, but I won’t

let it happen again.” Grunting, Dream then pushed to his feet, and wrapped an arm around Tommy’s shoulders. “Let’s head back to the Tower. I think we’re done for tonight.”

Leaning into Dream’s side, Tommy shoved down the guilt already bubbling deep inside of him. “Alright, let’s head back.”

Chapter End Notes

ok real quick i'm gonna repeat what i wrote in the beginning authors notes for this chapter to make sure no one missed it

READ THIS MESSAGE I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

I've been seeing people ask who's who in the comments. I want to remind you all that in the first chapter of this fic, I said in the authors notes that every time I introduce a new character, if I want you to know who they are behind the mask I will say who they are in the end authors notes for the chapter they are introduced in. Please stop asking me in the comments who is who because it's literally in the authors notes. Also please just read the authors notes in general before asking me questions in the comments because like 75% of the time the answer is already in there.

ok sorry for that repeat but I'm really tired of getting the same questions in my comments over and over again when I'm literally doing everything I can to give you the answers you want.

ANYWAY ok now that that's over, once I figured out what I wanted to do with this chapter, I had a lot of fun with it! I love writing Gamble and Tommy interactions, and then I had the idea for the Orpheus Tommy convo and was like ohoho now that's interesting

next chapter is going to be REALLY fun because we're going to have a lot more worldbuilding elements brought up. look forward to that!

ok now I have a discord server for all my fics! there you can discuss my stuff with other readers and theorize about where this story is going! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

also I have a playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)!

anyway please let me know what you thought down in the comments! I don't reply to most but I read them all and they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

sin city

Chapter Summary

The heroes take a field trip to gather some information.

Chapter Notes

hey hey beloveds I'm back with more! I was super excited to write this chapter because it introduces a ton more cool worldbuilding stuff I've been wanting to mention, so I hope you have a lot of fun with this

as always, ty all so much for the love you've given this fic so far. I'm really glad you guys like my new take on a superhero au lol

no TWs needed for this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Alright everyone, I’ve gathered you guys here so we can talk about what we know regarding the Syndicate situation so far, and spitball some new ideas for how we can get more information on what’s going on,” Dream announced to the room, clapping his hands together like he was giving some kind of presentation.

It was early afternoon. Sunlight spilled across the table of the conference room through the blinds, creating slanting shadows that criss-crossed over Tommy’s hands. Across from him, Hellion was slumped over the table, his chin in his hands as he watched Dream’s presentation with glazed over eyes. Next to Hellion, Cordyceps straight up had his head resting on his arms like he was trying to sleep, although his white goggles hid if his eyes were open or closed.

Dream had pulled the three of them into a meeting that day, announcing they needed to stop waiting for the Syndicate to make their next move and make one of their own. While Tommy had worked with Hellion plenty of times in the past, Cordyceps was a hero he rarely saw. Sure, he and Dream talked on the phone all the time, but it was rare to actually see Cordyceps out of his room. Though Tommy supposed when your powers revolved around being able to put people to sleep, it made sense if you needed to sleep a lot as well.

It had been a week since Tommy’s talk with Orpheus. Dream had never realized the truth of what happened when he was possessed, and Tommy kept debating whether or not he needed to fess up.

Tommy had no idea what Orpheus was thinking now. At first, he had assumed that the villain knew he was Tommy, the kid they had kidnapped. But he had also sounded so genuinely sad when he talked to Tommy about his theory, and Tommy had no idea if he would really care that much about some random kid he kidnapped.

Unless it had been an attempt at manipulating him. Trying to make him think that the Syndicate had cared about him when they had him in captivity, all in an attempt to lure him back into their clutches. Tommy wasn't stupid. If that was their plan, he wasn't going to fall for it.

The Syndicate were murderers. Heartless monsters who took what they wanted with no regard for others. There was no sympathy to be had for them. Especially not after what they did to his brother.

Tommy hadn't gotten anymore memories of his brother in the past week. He still only had the same glimpses flashing through his head. Small puzzle pieces to a much larger picture that was locked behind the walls in his own mind.

He desperately wanted to remember more. He wanted a face, a name, anything at all to prove to him that this was real. That he had someone who loved him. That, at least at one point in his life, he'd had the family he'd always wanted.

Right now, he could only go off of feelings and vague bits of intuition. It was driving him mad.

So Dream holding this meeting was a welcome distraction from Tommy's amnesia. If he could focus on their goal of trying to take the Syndicate down, he wouldn't have to think about the memories he'd lost. It was just a temporary band-aid, but it helped the open wound that was his heart feel the tiniest bit better all the same.

"Well... What do we know so far?" Hellion spoke up after a few beats, when Dream's initial question had only been answered with silence.

"We know that the Syndicate is looking for something," Cordyceps mumbled, not lifting his head. "We know that they're probably looking for a person since Circe and Moros were asking the police chief about homeless shelters, and we know that they're gonna be assholes about it until they find whoever it is they want."

Dream snapped his fingers. "Yup, that's pretty much it. Though we also know that Acheron and Orpheus broke into one of our warehouses looking for something specific and didn't find it, which could also imply they're looking for an object instead of a person."

"Maybe they thought whatever device they were looking for would help them find the person they want?" Hellion suggested, his dark eyebrows furrowing together. "Like, we do have power trace detectors if you want to find where a specific person last used their powers. That could help find someone."

"But those only work with a few powers, and even if they are compatible with the power the person they're looking for has, those things are dogshit and almost never work anyway,"

Cordyceps pointed out.

“Yeah, but the Syndicate doesn’t know that,” Hellion argued.

“Okay, I think we’re getting off topic here,” Dream cut in. “We don’t know what it was the Syndicate was looking for in the warehouse so I don’t think we should be jumping to conclusions about anything specific.”

Hellion frowned at that, while Cordyceps yawned into his hand. Like always, they weren’t getting anywhere with the little information they had, and they all knew it.

Suddenly, Dream turned to look at Tommy.

“Lucid, when Orpheus possessed me last week and you two fought, did he mention anything about the thing he was searching for?”

Tommy tensed, flashing back to the long discussion they’d had about Lucid’s possible identity.

“Not really,” Tommy lied, praying no one could hear the way his voice shook. “He just said some shit about how you were a bitch and he had a meeting to go to.”

Hellion snorted. “Did he actually call Dream a bitch?”

Tommy forced himself to snicker so he seemed more relaxed. “No, but I could tell that’s what he wanted to say.”

“Did he say who he was meeting with?” Dream asked sharply.

“No, he didn’t,” Tommy answered.

Humming, Dream tapped the chin of his mask and folded his arms over his chest. Silence fell over the group once again, and Tommy struggled to think of something he could suggest.

It was hard to try and contribute to this conversation when he and Dream both had a pretty good idea of what it was the Syndicate was looking for. Tommy wasn’t even sure why Dream was discussing this considering he knew it wasn’t going to lead them down any viable paths, but it wasn’t up to him to question what Dream wanted to discuss. He just had to pretend he was as clueless as Hellion and Cordyceps.

“What about those names we heard before?” Hellion suddenly asked. “The ones that we could never figure out who they belonged to.”

“What, you mean Asphodel, Lethe, and Styx?” Dream questioned.

Hellion nodded. “Yeah, did we ever find anything with those?”

Tommy straightened a bit in his seat at those names, wondering who they were referring to.

“Who are those people?” Tommy asked.

"Oh right, I forgot you wouldn't know about this," Dream said, glancing over at him. "Asphodel, Lethe, and Styx are three names we've heard the Syndicate members throw around before, but we've never actually seen the people they belong to. We've theorized that it's three members of the Syndicate who haven't made their membership public, but that's all we really have on them."

"For all we know, it could just be some red herring the Syndicate mentioned to confuse us," Cordyceps said.

"Even if that's not the case, I don't think they're very relevant to whatever's going on now. We haven't heard the Syndicate mention any of them in months," Dream explained, "so we need to focus on the stuff relevant to *now*. What do we know that can help our current situation?"

After a minute of no one talking, Cordyceps spoke up again.

"Why don't we just go to Las Nevadas and get information from there?"

All eyes in the room immediately whipped towards Cordyceps.

"Are you crazy?" Hellion asked, straightening up in his seat. "You want us to just waltz into Las Nevadas in our full hero gear like it's no big deal and ask Dionysus, 'hey do you know what's going on with the Syndicate?'"

"I mean, I'm sure Dionysus knows what they're doing, and he's traded information with us before," Cordyceps shrugged.

"Yeah, he fucking knows what they're doing because he's literally part of the Syndicate!" Hellion exclaimed.

"Eh, I mean, he's not exactly a full member of the Syndicate," Dream cut in, leaning back against the wall. "Dionysus is a complicated guy. He works with the Syndicate, yes, but Las Nevadas itself is not affiliated with the group."

"You're an idiot if you think we could get someone else in Las Nevadas to talk to us. Nothing goes down there without Dionysus knowing about it," Hellion pointed out.

"I'm not saying we try to go behind Dionysus' back like that. I don't have a goddamn death wish," Cordyceps huffed, finally sitting upright. "I'm saying if we offer Dionysus something valuable enough, he might be willing to trade some insider information about what's going on with the Syndicate. It wouldn't be anything major obviously, but it might be enough to push us in the right direction."

Humming to himself, Dream considered this for a moment, before looking at Tommy.

"Lucid, what do you know about Las Nevadas?"

Tommy blinked, shying back when Hellion and Cordyceps eyes landed on him. "Um, I know it's a casino, but there's some shady shit going on there. And it's run by that guy Dionysus

who I'm pretty sure is a villain but I can't really remember anything he's actually done wrong.”

“Makes sense. The news doesn’t talk about Las Nevadas that much since we don’t have any concrete evidence of what’s going on there, so it’s mostly just hero-only information,” Dream said, pushing off the wall to rest his elbows on the table. “To put it bluntly, Las Nevadas the casino is a front for a black market. The richest people in L’Manberg go there when they want to buy things that you can’t really acquire anywhere else.”

Oh. Holy shit.

“Like what kinds of things?” Tommy asked.

“Oh y’know, rare jewels, one of a kind pieces of jewelry, expensive paintings that mysteriously ‘disappeared’. Anything a rich person would want, but wouldn’t be able to get normally,” Dream explained. “The thing is, we only really know this through word of mouth. We’ve never been able to find out where they keep all these stolen goods in the building, and police have raided the place multiple times before. That’s why it’s still up and operational because we don’t have an actual reason to shut it down.”

“The thing is,” Cordyceps chimed in, “Las Nevadas doesn’t just deal in rare items either. It also deals in information.”

“Dionysus loves his secrets more than anything else. If you need to know something, he’s the guy you go to,” Dream continued. “He’s done business with us in the past for trading information, but the stuff he tells us is usually very limited. Obviously since he works with the Syndicate, he doesn’t want to give us anything that could fuck up his business with them. But if what we offer in exchange is good enough, he’ll usually help us at least get an idea of what we need to know.”

Frowning, Tommy folded his hands in front of him. “So you’re saying we need to go to Las Nevadas and offer up secrets of our own to try and get an idea of what the Syndicate’s plans are?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what they’re saying,” Hellion scoffed. “Not like it’s actually gonna work.”

“You’re just saying that because you don’t like Dionysus,” Cordyceps teased, nudging Hellion’s shoulder.

Hellion rolled his eyes. “He’s an annoying prick! I don’t know what to tell you! The guy wouldn’t stop messing with me when we went there before.”

“I think he just thought it was funny to piss you off. If you didn’t let him get under your skin so much he wouldn’t fuck with you,” Dream told him, reaching out to pat Hellion’s shoulder. “Either way though, you’re coming with us to Las Nevadas.”

Groaning, Hellion dropped his forehead onto the table. “Why though?”

“Because if things get sticky, you’re the only one who could get us out of there quickly with your smoke travel,” Dream explained.

“So it’s just gonna be the four of us?” Cordyceps asking, gesturing around the room.

“Yup, that’s what I’m thinking. And don’t tell anyone outside this room about our plan. The Committee would have a tantrum if they knew we were going to trade information.”

Holy shit. They were really doing it. They were going to actually go to Las Nevadas.

Tommy wasn’t sure if he was terrified or excited at the idea of walking into a villain-run black market. On the one hand, he should be scared shitless. But on the other hand, this could provide invaluable information to help them take the Syndicate down.

“So when do we leave?” Tommy asked, turning to Dream.

Even though Dream’s face was covered by his mask, Tommy could tell he was wearing a matching smile underneath.



The casino was far grander than what Tommy had been expecting.

Apparently it was both a casino and a hotel. White stone made up the twenty floor building, and darker grey stone lined the driveway loop. There was a huge fountain in front of the building, and as they drove past it and towards the valet station, Tommy pressed his face to the glass, gasping at the way the water glittered like it was made of liquid gold.

Their driver stopped in front of a large pair of double glass doors, where valets in suits were waiting with friendly faces. Tommy could see men and women in designer clothing get out of the cars in front of them, laughing and chatting with their unnaturally white smiles as they brushed past the employees and into the casino proper.

The car they were riding in stopped, and a valet opened the back passenger door that Dream was sitting next to. As soon as he looked inside and was met with Dream’s smiling mask though, his mouth dropped open in shock.

“Uh-”

“We’re here to do business,” Dream said, cutting the man off as he climbed out of the car. Cordyceps, who had been sitting in the middle, scooted out behind him, while Tommy stepped out the other side of the car. Hellion then climbed out of the front passenger seat, and soon all four of the heroes were standing in front of the terrified-looking valet.

The valet glanced between them all, wide eyes lingering on their masks. Then, he lifted a hand to his earpiece.

“Hey, we have a Code Green out here,” the valet said, gaze fixing on Dream.

“Code Green? Couldn’t have come up with something more creative?” Dream asked with a snort.

The valet didn’t respond as security guards suddenly rushed from the entrance of the building. They were all wearing dark uniforms and had their faces covered by black masks. Tommy tensed when he noticed the holsters each of them wore on their hips, but no one reached for their weapons as they surrounded the heroes in a circle.

A few feet away, Tommy noticed a wealthy couple gasping as they noticed the heroes as well, and Tommy fought not to shrink under their gazes.

“Do you have a warrant to enter the premises?” One of the guards asked.

“No, you don’t need to worry about that. We’re here to request a meeting with Dionysus,” Dream said coolly, folding his arms over his chest.

The guard frowned and was silent for a moment, before he leaned down to whisper something in another guard’s ear. The two of them spoke too softly to be overhead, but after a few moments, the first guard straightened up.

“Please wait a moment,” he said as the other guard tapped a few buttons on his own wristwatch.

The group fell silent after that. Tommy shifted from foot to foot, squirming under the stares of the casino patrons that passed by them. The guards didn’t move from their circle, and Tommy resisted the urge to shrink into Dream’s side. This wasn’t a fight, and he shouldn’t act like it was. They were just here to do business, nothing more.

A few minutes passed. Then, the doors to the casino opened again, and someone new walked out.

The man wore one of those venetian jester masks that covered his entire face, painted in shades of white and gold. The white parts of the mask itself were dotted with the kinds of hearts you would see on a playing card, except instead of being red, the hearts were a light shade of green.

“Hello Dream from the Hero Tower and friends!” The new person greeted, sounding oddly cheerful compared to the guards. “What’s going on here?”

“Fides,” Dream greeted, dipping his head slightly. “We’re here to do business with Dionysus. Is he here tonight?”

Fides. That was a name Tommy hadn’t heard before, but it was enough to tell him that this was another villain they were dealing with. Distantly, Tommy wondered why he’d never heard of Fides before, especially since Dream seemed familiar with him.

“Oh, you guys wanna see Dionysus?” Fides asked, sounding genuinely surprised. “Well, it’s your lucky day then because he’s actually here tonight!” Turning to one of the guards, Fides

whispered something in his ear. “If you wanna see Dionysus, I’m gonna have to bring you in the back.”

“Lead the way,” Dream said, gesturing to the doors.

Nodding eagerly, Fides led the way inside the casino, the guards walking around them in their giant circle. As they stepped through the glass doors, Tommy winced at the heavy smell of cigarette smoke in the air, and had to fight the urge to cough.

The inside of the casino was just as grand as the outside. Marble tiles clicked under their boots, men and women all held crystalline champagne glasses in delicately manicured hands, and a glittering chandelier that couldn’t have been anything but real crystal dominated the space above their heads.

They passed through the main foyer, Fides leading them away from the front desks and towards the casino floor itself. The ground changed from tile to checkered carpet, the smell of smoke getting even thicker as they passed through the playing tables swarmed by drunk rich people. A few people glanced their way, but most were too focused on their games, a roar of cheers sounding out when they passed by a table with a spinning roulette wheel.

Turning away from the distractions of the casino floor, Tommy tried to focus on Fides himself. Who was he? He must have been high up if he had been called to handle them, but his cheerful demeanor wasn’t anything Tommy had been expecting for someone working at a black market.

There was something off about Fides. As he walked, Tommy noticed there was a strange bounce to his steps. Almost like he was jiggling with every move he made. It was like watching a real life cartoon character, moving in that exaggerated way that shouldn’t have been humanly possible.

They reached the back corner of the casino floor, hitting a plain double door labeled ‘staff’ on the front. There was a scanner next to it, and Fides took a card out of his pocket, swiping it over the black box and making the light turn from red to green. There was a loud clicking sound, and then one of the guards opened the doors, gesturing for them all to go in.

The back of the casino was far less opulent than the front. Plain white walls closed in on them as Fides led them down a long hallway. Hellion was clenching his fists at his sides, the only sign any of the other heroes were nervous. Both Dream and Cordyceps seemed perfectly at ease, their shoulders straight as they walked side by side.

Suddenly, Fides stopped in front of a plain black door on the right side of the hallway.

“You’re gonna have to put all your weapons in here before you can go into Dionysus’ office,” Fides explained, opening the door and gesturing inside.

It was a plain room with grey walls, holding only a single metal table and chair.

Tommy bristled. “We’re not.”

“It’s okay, Lucid,” Dream said, cutting him off. “Do what Fides says and leave your weapons in here.”

In all his time as Dream’s sidekick, Tommy never would’ve imagined his mentor so easily disarming himself. Especially when they were meeting with a villain. But Tommy watched as he slid his sword out of its sheath, setting it down on the plain metal table. Cordyceps took out his throwing knives (which took nearly two minutes because holy shit that guy had a lot of knives), while Hellion slid off his brass knuckles.

Ignoring the nausea crawling up his throat as anxiety buzzed in his chest, Tommy slid the baton off of his hip, and rested it next to Dream’s sword. Dream gave him an approving nod, and then they all made their way out of the room again.

“I’m gonna lock it to make sure no one steals your stuff,” Fides reassured them, closing the door with an audible *click!*

“You’re not gonna search us to make sure we’re not hiding anything else?” Tommy asked without thinking.

As soon as the words slipped out, Tommy winced. What kind of fucking idiot asked to be searched?

Dream shot him a glare, but Fides cheerfully quipped, “I can search you if you want!”

“Um, no thanks,” Tommy muttered, cheeks flaring red under his mask.

Hellion snickered and Tommy shot him a glare. Either Hellion didn’t notice or didn’t care though, because he ignored Tommy as the group left the room with their weapons and headed down the next hallway.

Fides led them through another set of plain black doors, and the white walls transformed into a rich, dark green color. The tile changed to wood, and suddenly it was as if they were in some expensive, old building instead of the backroom of a casino.

Tommy hadn’t noticed till now, but the guards had dwindled their numbers until there were only two guards left trailing them. Fides didn’t seem worried at all about this, still bouncing in that strange, jelly-like way with every step.

Finally, after going down a few more twists and turns, they reached a large pair of dark oak doors. Fides knocked three times, and after a few seconds of waiting, Tommy heard a muffled, “come in!”

Holding up a hand to tell them to wait, Fides opened the door just a crack and slipped inside. This left the heroes alone with the guards.

“Who the hell is this Fides guy?” Tommy whispered to Dream as soon as he was gone.

“He’s Dionysus’ right hand man,” Dream whispered back. “When Dionysus isn’t around, he’s the one who runs Las Nevadas in his place.”

Damn. So he was really high up there.

“Why is he so... jiggly?” Tommy then asked.

Dream chuckled. “It’s, uh, hard to explain but it’s related to his power.”

Before Tommy could ask what the hell that meant, the doors opened again. This time they didn’t just open a crack though. Instead, Fides opened them all the way, and gestured for them to come inside.

It was an office. A large, dark wood desk sat at the head of the room, in front of a large window that overlooked some kind of courtyard shrouded by shadow. The walls were lined with gorgeous paintings in heavy gold frames, and Tommy winced when he noticed a painting he had seen on the news a few years back, reportedly having been stolen.

The old wooden floors were covered with thick, colorful rugs. Plush chairs were scattered around in front of the desk, giving any visitors plenty of options for where they wanted to sit. In one of the chairs, Tommy noticed a lithe man wearing a fox-like mask sitting down, completely ignoring the group as they walked inside. Tommy could see he had red hair with streaks of white peeking through, and wondered if that was natural, or if the guy purposefully dyed his hair like that.

Then, behind the large desk, Tommy saw the man who had to be Dionysus.

Dionysus wore a venetian jester mask similar to the one Fides had on. It was decorated with white and gold, but instead of green hearts, the pattern on it was of blue diamonds instead. Along with that, the mask only covered the right half of his face, as if it had been perfectly cut down the middle.

The left side of his face was completely visible, and Tommy winced when his gaze fell on it.

A huge, puckered scar ran down the length of the left side of his face, from his forehead almost to the bottom of his chin. It passed through his eye, turning it white and milky, which led Tommy to believe he couldn’t see out of it. The scar also went through his mouth, causing part of his upper lip to be pulled up by the scar tissue, revealing that he had a gold tooth.

Tommy didn’t want to know what the hell would have caused a scar like that, let alone how Dionysus even survived it.

Other than the scar, Dionysus seemed like a relatively normal-looking guy. He had short dark hair that stuck up in a few different directions, and was wearing a button down shirt with slacks and suspenders. As the door shut behind them, Dionysus stood up from his chair, and Tommy realized the man was short—he probably would barely reach Tommy’s chin if they stood side by side.

His size did nothing to lessen how intimidated Tommy was by him. Even though he hadn’t said a single word yet, Tommy could feel the way Dionysus’ good eye scanned over all of them, watching them like a hawk.

In the back of his mind, there was something nagging at Tommy. Like he was getting *deja vu* from being in this office and seeing Dionysus.

It was almost like familiarity.

“Well well well, I wasn’t expecting this kind of a visit tonight,” Dionysus commented, his voice tinged metal by the voice changer wrapped around his throat. “It’s been a while since you’ve visited, Dream.”

“We’re here to do business,” Dream said without preamble.

The visible part of Dionysus’ mouth curled up in a cat-like smirk. “My favorite kinds of visits. Please, take a seat!”

Tommy gave Dream an uncertain look, and he gestured for Tommy to sit in a plush chair next to him. The fox guy stayed in his chair near the back of the group, while Hellion and Cordyceps settled down to the left of Tommy.

“Do you need me for this, or should I go back to watching the casino floor?” Fides asked, and Tommy noticed he was still waiting by the door.

“You can go, Fides. I got it handled from here,” Dionysus said, waving him off.

Giving Dionysus a thumbs up, Tommy nearly lurched back when Fides suddenly *dissolved into a pile of neon green goo on the floor. His stomach turned when he watched the goo slither out under the door to the office, and he was so grateful his mask was hiding his expression because he knew he probably looked like a deer in headlights right now.*

“Looks like you decided to bring your whole squad with you tonight,” Dionysus commented, pulling Tommy’s attention away from the door and back to him. “Hellion, you look like you’ve been doing well for yourself.”

Hellion narrowed his eyes. “What can I say? I’ve been busy.”

“A shame, really. You should stop by more often! I feel like you’d have pretty good luck on the casino floor,” Dionysus teased, resting his elbows on his desk. “Of course, a pretty face like yours can find good luck just about anywhere I bet.”

Oh. So that’s what Hellion meant when he said Dionysus would mess with him.

Rolling his eyes, Hellion leaned back in his seat. “You haven’t even seen my face.”

“Your eyes tell me enough,” Dionysus shot back. “What’s that bullshit they say about eyes? Windows to the soul or whatever?”

“Can you two stop flirting so we can actually do what we came here to do?” Tommy cut in with a scoff.

At this, Dionysus’ head whipped towards him, and Tommy resisted the urge to shrink back into his seat.

"Lucid, I don't believe we've met before," Dionysus said, grinning at him. "I've been hearing a lot about you. I would introduce myself, but I'm sure you already know who I am."

"I do," Tommy answered, trying not to sound rude but not polite either.

"What'd you tell him about me, Dream?" Dionysus asked, his milky eye flickering over to Dream. "What's my reputation in the Hero Tower these days?"

"He said you run Las Nevadas, and that you like having information," Tommy said before Dream could answer for him. "Also are we just gonna ignore the fox dude over there?" He added, pointing at the fox guy still sitting in his chair.

The fox guy looked up at being mentioned, and snorted as he leaned further back in his seat. "Pretend like I'm not even here," he said, his voice carrying an accent Tommy hadn't heard before.

Dionysus chuckled. "You don't need to worry about Reynard. He's allowed to listen in on things like this."

Reynard, huh? Kind of a stupid fucking name if you asked Tommy.

"Lucid, I think that's enough," Dream cut in, squeezing his shoulder in a not so gentle way.

Tommy took the hint and went silent after that, and Dream gave him a long look before finally dropping his hand.

"So, now that introductions are out of the way, what kind of business are you here to see me about?" Dionysus asked, his milky eye flickering back to Dream.

"We want to know what's going on with the Syndicate," Dream began without any preamble. "As I'm sure you've noticed, they've been causing a bit of trouble for us recently."

Dionysus snorted. "Yeah, no shit I've noticed. They've been practically tearing the city down to find what they think you took from them."

"Do you know what the thing they want is?" Cordyceps asked, and Tommy startled because he'd forgotten Cordyceps was even there.

Dionysus' deformed lip pulled up into a smirk again. "Of course I do. But I'm not gonna tell you what it is."

"Why do they think Dream has it then?" Hellion cut in. "Even if you can't tell us what it is, can you explain why they seem convinced Dream had something to do with it?"

"Recent information came to light that led them to believe Dream was involved in the disappearance of this... thing. I can't go into more detail than that, though," Dionysus said, kicking his feet up onto his desk.

"Then what the hell can you tell us?" Dream pushed, leaning forward to rest his hands on the desk.

"Well, that depends on what questions you ask, and what you offer me in return," Dionysus explained, pulling a poker chip out of his pocket and rubbing it with his thumb. "My hands are tied when it comes to most of this stuff. This is a really touchy subject with the Syndicate right now, so I'm on strict orders not to say too much."

"So we have to ask the right questions if we want to get answers?" Cordyceps muttered, brows furrowing above his goggles.

Dionysus snapped his fingers. "Pretty much. Keep in mind, while my main loyalty lies to Las Nevadas, the Syndicate are my main business partners. I'm going to protect them over you guys any day."

"We're well aware, Dionysus," Dream grumbled.

Silence fell over the room. Dionysus tossed his poker chip up and down in the air, Cordyceps and Dream leaned over to speak in hushed whispers, Hellion fiddled with the ends of his headband, and Reynard watched the whole group with dark, calculating eyes. At one point, Tommy glanced behind him and noticed the strange man staring right at him.

When Reynard noticed Tommy had seen him, he didn't look away. Instead, he just gave Tommy a small and knowing smile, and Tommy suppressed the urge to shudder as he faced back towards Dionysus.

Finally, after nearly two minutes of dead air, Dream spoke up again.

"I'm guessing you can't tell us what the next attack is going to be," Dream began. Dionysus hummed and nodded, gesturing for Dream to go on. "But can I ask when the next attack is going to happen?"

The poker chip fell out of the air, landing into Dionysus' waiting palm. He curled his fingers around the plastic, dropping his feet off of the desk and straightening up in his seat.

"Now you're asking the right questions," Dionysus practically purred. "I can give you a date, but before I start singing like a canary I'm gonna need something from you."

"How about you answer our questions first, and then afterwards you can talk to me and Cordyceps alone and we'll tell you information that you think is equivalent in value," Dream suggested.

Tommy and Hellion both stiffened at this.

"Hey, what about me?" Hellion demanded, scowling at Dream.

"And me!" Tommy chimed in.

Dionysus chuckled as he looked between both Hellion and Tommy with something almost akin to pity in his eyes. "Both of you should chill out and thank Dream for what he's offering. He's keeping you two from being culpable for any information he leaks."

"But we're heroes too! We have a right to know-

"Hellion, just trust me on this," Dream said, cutting Hellion off. "It's better for both you and Lucid if you don't know what we trade."

Fuck. Tommy hated being left in the dark like this, but at least Hellion seemed to be thinking the same thing. On the one hand, he understood why Dream was doing this. If it ever got out that Dream had traded Hero secrets with a literal villain like Dionysus, he could be suspended or even kicked from the Heroes. If they were all present when it happened, they all would be on the line for it. But if Tommy and Hellion both had plausible deniability, they'd likely only get off with a warning.

Still, frustration bubbled up inside of him, crawling up his throat and twisting his lips into a scowl. He forced himself to keep quiet, and judging by the fury dancing in Hellion's eyes, he was thinking the same thing.

When neither of them said anything, Dream nodded at them both in silent thanks. Then, he looked back at Dionysus. "Alright, so for now, can you tell us when the next Syndicate attack will be?"

"Sure thing," Dionysus grinned. "The reason they've been so quiet lately is because they're planning something big. Like that stunt they pulled with the explosives, but even more so. A week from today is when they're gonna pull it, so you better have your asses ready for what they have in store."

"I don't suppose you could tell us where it's gonna go down?" Cordyceps asked, folding his hands on his lap.

That sharp smile was back. "Not anything specific, but I can tell you to keep an eye on South End."

A week from today in South End. Holy shit. That was way more than Tommy thought they would get out of the villain.

"That helps us immensely," Dream said, dipping his head in thanks. "Hellion, Lucid, how about you two go back to the main casino floor while we settle our end of the bargain with Dionysus?"

"I can take them back," Reynard offered, pushing to his feet.

Nodding, Dionysus waved him to the door. "Yeah, that sounds good. Thanks Reynard."

Figuring that was his cue to go, Tommy stood up at the same time as Hellion. Cordyceps didn't look up as they headed towards the door, meanwhile Dream watched them both, his blank mask lingering on Tommy like he was silently reminding Tommy that this was for the best.

"It was a pleasure seeing you as always, Hellion," Dionysus said, getting to his feet as well to shake Hellion's hand. Then, he turned to Tommy. "And it was great finally getting to meet you, Lucid."

Tommy shook his hand, noting how his grip was surprisingly gentle compared to what he'd been expecting. Again, despite the height difference between them, Tommy still felt like he was looking up at Dionysus when his eyes met Dionysus' scarred one.

"Nice meeting you too," Tommy replied robotically.

Dionysus chuckled. "Feel free to stop by anytime you wanna test your luck, Lucid."

"I'll keep that in mind," Tommy muttered, knowing Dionysus wasn't just referring to a game of poker.

When Dionysus let go of his hand, Hellion put his own hand on Tommy's shoulder, guiding him towards the door. Reynard held it open for them, and Tommy swallowed down the bitterness as he watched Dionysus return to his desk, with Dream and Cordyceps both facing away from them.

The door slammed shut behind them. Reynard led them back the way they came, through the opulent hallway and back into the plain one. He brought them to the room they'd left their weapons in, and Hellion reclaimed his brass knuckles while Tommy grabbed his baton. He stared at Dream's sword and Cordyceps' throwing knives, clenching his jaw as he wondered how much longer they'd sit there until the two heroes came to get them.

Reynard cleared his throat pointedly when Tommy paused for too long. Shaking himself off, he hurried back out of the room with Hellion at his side, and they resumed their walk back to the main casino.

The main casino floor was the same as how they'd left it. Full of smoke and rich people. When the staff door shut behind them, Reynard leaned against the wall, his dark eyes flickering between Lucid and Hellion.

"While we wait for your friends, how about we get drinks?" Reynard suggested, gesturing to a bar at the far end of the casino floor.

Tommy opened his mouth to say he'd rather not, but Hellion answered before him.

"Yes please, god knows I fucking need one after that," he said, shaking his head.

Reynard smirked and slapped Hellion's shoulder. "Good man! Let's go."

Rolling his eyes, Tommy followed behind Reynard and Hellion as they made their way towards the bar. It was an expensive thing, made of glossy, dark wood with the wall behind it decorated with dozens of colorful bottles. There were a few people scattered around the velvet barstools, and Reynard easily slipped into one near the far edge of the bar. Hellion sat down next to him, leaving one chair open on Hellion's right, so Tommy took that for himself.

Technically, it was illegal for him to sit at a bar given his age. But of course he wasn't going to say that.

Reynard waved the bartender over and looked at both Hellion and Tommy. "What'll you guys have?"

“Anything that’s alcoholic with a straw,” Hellion grumbled, gesturing to the mask that covered the lower half of his face.

Throwing his head back, Reynard let out a loud laugh. “Ah yes, of course! How could I forget?” Then his eyes darted to Tommy. “Same for you, Lucid?”

Tommy gulped. Dream would probably kill him if he knew he’d had alcohol, and it wasn’t something Tommy really wanted to try anyway.

“I’m not gonna have anything,” Tommy said, shaking his head.

Reynard pouted. “Damn, you’re no fun.” Thankfully, he didn’t push the issue more than that though, because he looked back at the bartender. “Moscow Mule for Hellion over here, and a White Russian for me.”

The bartender nodded and got to work, while Hellion snorted. “Moscow Mule? Seriously?”

Reynard held his hands up in mock surrender. “Hey man, it comes with a straw so it works.”

Tommy didn’t know the drinks they were talking about. There was no alcohol in Dream’s apartment, because Dream hated drinking. He said it tasted disgusting, and he disliked the idea of not being in full control of his faculties. Tommy agreed with that, not liking the idea of not being fully there. And in a situation like this? Tommy wanted to stay as present as he could.

Hellion and Reynard devolved into a conversation about cocktails that Tommy quickly tuned out. His eyes skimmed the colorful bottles lining the wall behind the bar, noting the different alcohol brands and how intricate some of the carvings on the bottles seemed to be.

Suddenly, there was a voice to his right.

“Lucid?”

Stiffening in his seat, Tommy looked over to see a man sitting two barstools away from him, staring at him with a curious expression.

The man looked to be somewhere in his early to mid twenties. He was dressed in slacks and a black turtleneck, with curly brown hair falling over his eyes and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses perched on the edge of his nose. In one hand, he was holding what looked like a glass of whiskey, and Tommy guessed this was a civilian who recognized him from the news.

For some reason, when Tommy’s eyes first landed on the man, his heart skipped a beat in his chest.

“Uh, that’s me,” Tommy shrugged, trying not to look too awkward as he wondered if he needed to put on his Noble Hero Attitude.

“What are you doing in Las Nevadas?” The man asked, frowning at him.

Shit. Why the hell would a hero be hanging around in Las Nevadas?

“Hero business,” Tommy answered, trying to keep his tone brusque. “Can’t really go into detail.”

The man narrowed his eyes behind his glasses. His gaze flickered behind Tommy, noticing Hellion who was still talking with Reynard. “If you and Hellion are both here, I’d imagine that means Dream can’t be too far behind.”

“Like I said, I can’t really talk about it,” Tommy said, silently begging for Dream to hurry the fuck up so they could get out of here.

The corners of the man’s lips quirked up in something reminiscent of a smile. “Of course. It’s just not every day you come across a few Top Ten Heroes sitting at a bar.”

Tommy huffed at that. “I mean, I’m not a top ten hero.”

“You should be,” the man commented, tracing his finger around the edge of his glass. “You’re out there fighting side by side with Dream all the time and you haven’t died yet. I’d say that earns you a spot in the top ten.”

Flushing under his mask, Tommy shrugged again. “What, trying to compliment me so if a building is ever gonna fall on you I’ll make sure to save your ass?”

The man let out a startled laugh at this, tipping his head back and grin stretching wide across his cheeks. Tommy stiffened at the sound, déjà vu crashing over him like a wave.

“I guess you could say that,” the man agreed after he’d finished laughing.

Before Tommy could try to form a response, another man appeared behind the first one. This guy was a bit older, with blonde hair pulled back into a small ponytail at the nape of his neck, and a heavy trench coat resting on his shoulders.

“It’s almost time for our appointment,” the blonde man said to the brunet.

Nodding, the brunet downed the rest of his whiskey in one go, before pushing to his feet and glancing back at Tommy. “Pleasure meeting you, Lucid.”

The blonde man turned around, as if only just noticing Tommy for the first time. He stepped back, startled, before blinking a few times. “Oh, I didn’t know heroes came to this place.”

“He’s here on official ‘hero business,’” the brunet explained in a sort of teasing tone. “Nothing he can tell us about.”

The blonde man snorted. “Well, good luck with whatever you’re trying to do, mate.”

It was strange. Despite the fact that both of them were smiling, Tommy could almost see something pained in their eyes. The smiles they both wore were too stretched out, and there was something longing in their gazes as they both looked him over.

But as soon as it was there, the odd looks from the two men were gone.

“See you around,” the brunet waved.

And with that, the two men headed towards the casino floor, and Tommy was left reeling as the brunet man’s laugh echoed in his head.

Before he could even take a moment to think about what the fuck that was though, there was a familiar arm curling around his shoulders.

“C’mon Lucid,” Dream told him, tugging him off the barstool. “We’re leaving now.”

Glancing to the left, Tommy saw Reynard had disappeared, and Hellion was holding a copper mug with a metal straw in it, sipping it as he stood up. Cordyceps raised an eyebrow at Hellion’s drink, and he just shrugged, not moving to put it down.

They headed away from the casino doors and back to the front. Hellion handed his cup off to a random guard as they exited the building, and Tommy breathed a sigh of relief when he saw their car waiting for them.

Soon, they were in the car and driving away from the casino. Tommy melted into his seat, taking a deep breath of the cool air conditioning to get the smell of cigarette smoke out of his head. Anxiety was still thrumming through his veins, but not as badly as before.

Things were silent in the car for the first half of the drive back to the Tower. It was only when they were able to see their home in the distance, stretching out above the skyline like a finger trying to touch the sky, that someone spoke up.

“Are you really not gonna tell us what you told Dionysus?” Hellion asked, the anger long gone from his voice and replaced with resignation.

“You don’t need to know,” Dream said, shaking his head.

Hellion sighed and leaned his head back against the car seat. “How do we know that what Dionysus told us isn’t just a trap?”

“We don’t,” Cordyceps answered coolly. “It probably is a trap, but it’s still more of a lead than we’ve gotten in ages.”

“Don’t worry, we’re gonna figure out a plan,” Dream reassured him, looking between Hellion and Tommy both. “We got what we came for, so I consider this a success.”

Dream considered it a success.

Tommy wasn’t sure why he couldn’t seem to think of it the same way.

Either way, next week was going to be interesting for sure.

Chapter End Notes

we got some of the las nevadas crew popping up!! I love las nevadas in this world, it's so fun and I had a great time writing this whole thing out!! I hope you all know I was blasting the song 'Cult of Dionysus' whenever I was brainstorming worldbuilding for Las Nevadas in this fic lol

also: Cordyceps - George, Fides - Charlie, Reynard - Fundy
(if you're curious, Fides is the Roman personification of loyalty, while Reynard is the name of a mischievous fox that appears in several French/Dutch folklore tales, shoutout to my beta Darling for telling me about Reynard because I was STRUGGLING with fundy's name lol)

don't forget I have a discord server for my fics! sometimes the people in there get sneak peeks at new chapters, they're usually the first to hear about when i'm going to update, and i answer a lot of behind the scenes questions too! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I have a playlist for this fic so check it out [here!](#)

one more thing, I've seen questions about it again even though I've answered this in my authors notes before, THIS IS NOT CONNECTED TO CLINIC IN ANY WAY AT ALL. The names are different, the powers are different, this literally isn't connected to clinic whatsoever so please stop asking me if it is

anyway that aside I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter! make sure to leave a comment telling me what you thought, I don't reply but I read all of them and they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

down by the docks

Chapter Summary

It's the day of the Syndicate's big move.

Chapter Notes

hey hey everyone I'm back with more! I'm publishing this chapter in a rush before I go to the first in person lecture I'll have gone to all winter quarter since my uni was online for the entire month of january, so that's fun. but yeah these chapter notes won't be very long bc of that

anyway I don't think there are any trigger warnings for this chapter outside of like, usual violence yknow? you guys know what to expect at this point lmao

as always tsm for the love you're giving this fic, and I hope you enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It’s a trap, isn’t it?”

Dream sighed at Tommy’s question, dragging a hand down his mask and slumping back against the couch.

“I don’t know, Tommy. There’s definitely something weird with it, but Dionysus is usually a pretty reliable businessman. I don’t think he’d tell the Syndicate that he sold us information,” Dream explained, fiddling with the TV remote in his hand.

It was late afternoon, a few days after their Las Nevadas visit. Anxiety had been buzzing in Tommy’s chest like a bee hive had formed in his heart ever since they left the casino. The whole thing had felt almost too easy. Even though he didn’t know what information Dream had given to Dionysus for the heads up, it still felt like Dionysus had handed them a lead that was too big. Something too tangible to be real.

They had a date, and they had a location. If Dionysus was truly allied with the Syndicate, would he really have given the heroes that much information?

“You don’t know that for sure. Dionysus told us straight up that he’ll put his business with the Syndicate over us,” Tommy reminded him, stretching out across the floor so his legs were bathed in the warm sunlight spilling out over the carpet.

"I know, but it's not like he gave us anything major. Besides, he knows us well enough to know we're not stupid. Dionysus would know we'd suspect it was a trap," Dream pointed out, setting the remote down on the couch cushion next to him.

Tommy huffed. "Or maybe he'd rely on the fact that you think he's a reliable businessman."

"What is this? 5D chess?" Dream scoffed. Then, he paused, and let out another deep sigh. "Well, actually, it kind of is."

"I'm just saying I have a bad feeling about this," Tommy said, clenching his jaw as the livewire electricity hummed in his veins once more.

There was a beat of silence as Dream stretched his arms out over his head. Tommy watched, eyeing Dream's thin arms, lined with lean muscle. If most people were to see Dream in short sleeves, no one would think he was much of a threat. He looked a bit like Tommy with his slim frame. But his long limbs hid more muscle than you'd think he'd have, which was the reason he was able to go toe to toe with Acheron in a way few other heroes could.

"Trust me, Tommy. We're preparing for all possibilities," Dream reassured him, dropping his arms back down to his sides. "We're gonna have a whole backup crew waiting for us, ready to jump in as soon as I give the signal over the comms."

"Who's gonna be on backup?" Tommy asked, rolling onto his stomach so he could face Dream. The beige carpet itched against his elbows as he rested his chin in his hands, but he ignored it in favor of actually getting up.

"Still waiting to confirm, but I think we'll have Hellion, Cordyceps, and Gamble waiting on standby. Maybe Umbra too, not sure about her yet," Dream explained to him.

Tommy frowned. "Can't we get more people than that?"

Dream snorted and shook his head. "And try to explain to them why we know when the next time the Syndicate is going to make a move? Nah, Hellion and Cordyceps already know how we know that, and Gamble is smart about not sticking his nose where it doesn't belong. Umbra I'm a bit hesitant on, which is why she's a maybe. I don't trust anyone else not to go snitching to the Committee."

"I feel like that puts us at a disadvantage though," Tommy argued, frowning at Dream. "What's the point of knowing when they're going to strike if we can't even prepare anything beforehand?"

"We can prepare to have a few heroes on our side, which will still give us a huge advantage even if it's not everyone. Plus, we can be ready to alert police and tell them there's something big going on as soon as it starts." Putting his feet up on the coffee table, Dream tilted his mask towards the ceiling. "We want them to hold back though, so that the Syndicate doesn't realize we were tipped off. The last thing we want is to get on Dionysus' bad side."

Frowning, Tommy dropped his arms and rested his chin on the carpet instead. He really didn't like this. His gut was telling him that no matter their contingencies, the Syndicate was

going to be one step ahead of them. That even if they tried to play this game like they did, going behind the Committee's back to get information they shouldn't have, the Syndicate knew how to play it better.

Dream must've noticed his hesitation, because suddenly he was scooting off the couch and onto the ground in front of Tommy.

"You look worried," Dream commented. There was nothing mocking in his tone. Nothing that told Tommy he was disappointed in Tommy for his nerves. Instead, Dream sounded genuinely concerned, and that was what made Tommy glance up to meet the eyes of his mask.

"I am worried," Tommy admitted, staring at Dream through the curls that fell over his forehead. "Something's wrong here. It's too easy."

"I get why you're concerned. We haven't been on our best game recently fighting the Syndicate," Dream said, reaching a hand out to squeeze Tommy's shoulder. "But I've been a hero for a while now, Tommy. I know what I'm doing."

It certainly doesn't feel that way, was what Tommy wanted to say. He wanted to point out how every time they'd encountered the Syndicate, they'd gotten their asses beat. How despite Dream's promises of keeping him safe, Tommy never felt safe when they went into fights. He trusted Dream with his life, but the longer this whole game of cat and mouse seemed to go on between the Heroes and the Syndicate, the more Tommy wondered if Dream was actually this pillar of heroics like he made himself out to be.

But Tommy knew that wasn't a nice thing to say. Dream wasn't some all-knowing deity. He was just a person, as plain as Tommy himself was. He was trying his best, and sometimes he'd mess up. Tommy needed to remind himself of that.

And the truth was, despite his mistakes, Dream was the more experienced of the two of them. Tommy had only been in the hero game for a few months now. Dream had been doing this for years. If anyone knew how to fight the Syndicate, it was him. Dream was the Number One Hero for a reason.

When it came down to the wire, Tommy was Dream's sidekick. Dream had saved him, and now Tommy was doing his part to save him back. He owed the man that much.

"Okay Dream," Tommy muttered, dropping his eyes back down to the carpet.

"It's gonna be okay," Dream reassured him, his hand warm on Tommy's shoulder. "Don't worry. I'm gonna make sure the Syndicate gets what they deserve for what they did to you."

Clenching his jaw, Tommy thought back to his brother. The faceless man who wrapped him up in warm hugs and always promised him he'd be okay. The one who showed him new music, and made him laugh so hard his stomach hurt.

He may not remember the jokes, but he could remember the way his cheeks would ache from smiling so hard. He remembered his fingers being sticky with sugary donuts that his brother

had bought him, and he remembered a smooth voice singing along to a car radio.

It was nothing but flashes, but it was enough to make his heart ache all the same. And that ache was enough to turn into anger. Anger that made Tommy determined to make sure the Syndicate paid for what they took from him.

“Thank you,” Tommy whispered, his hand curling into a fist at his side.

Lifting his hand off of Tommy’s shoulder, Dream ruffled his hair affectionately.

“Of course, Tommy.”



Sure enough, a week after their visit to Las Nevadas, they got a heads up about the Syndicate being spotted down by the docks in South End.

It was well into the evening when they got the call. Although Dream hadn’t admitted it, Tommy could tell he had been on edge all day. He kept glancing towards the phone, as if he was mentally trying to will it to ring.

Tommy wasn’t much better. At first, he debated going down to the gym to sweat out his nerves, but Dream had pointed out he would be exhausted by the time things actually kicked off, so Tommy decided against it. Instead, he found himself pacing around the apartment, trying to find some way to work off the anxiety thrumming through his veins but not having any real outlet.

Time had seemed to drag on. The hours were sticky, with every check of the clock telling Tommy only a few minutes had passed since the last time he looked. By the time the sun had set, both he and Dream were beginning to wonder if Dionysus had lied to them. Or, if the Syndicate had changed their plans for another day. Either option was possible.

Tommy hadn’t tasted any of his dinner. Dream had insisted they eat so they had their strength up, but the sandwich Dream made him was little more than cardboard in his mouth. Still, he had forced it down his throat, and then sat stiffly on the couch, tapping his foot as he and Dream both watched the phone to wait for the inevitable.

And then, finally, the phone had rung, and Dream had nearly lunged to pick it up. As soon as he answered, Tommy heard his voice drop, and he knew that it was the call they’d been waiting for.

Before Dream was even off the phone, Tommy had gotten dressed and strapped the Lucid mask around his face. It only took another few minutes for Dream to get dressed after he hung up, and soon they were on their way.

Thanatos, Acheron, and Orpheus had been spotted at the docks. To fit with Dream’s earlier point of not wanting to charge in guns blazing so they didn’t know the heroes had been tipped off, Hellion, Cordyceps, and Gamble were all waiting a few blocks away from the docks. Along with them, they had a legion of police cars waiting as well.

The night air was cool where it ruffled Tommy's hair. He could smell petrichor on the asphalt, from when it had rained earlier that day. The flashing lights of the police cars reflected off the buildings that towered around the street, and Tommy had to blink a few times to clear his vision.

"Alright, I'm going to turn on my comms when I need you guys," Dream explained, pointing to the comm system on his wrist. "I don't know if I'm going to be able to say anything, but if I open up the comms and you just hear me fighting or whatever the fuck, just know that it means you need to come get us."

"We got it, Dream," Gamble nodded, tapping the claws he'd shapeshifted against his arm.
"We'll wait for your signal."

"Are you sure you don't think I should go with you and Lucid?" Hellion asked, frowning at Dream.

"So far, it's mostly just been me and Lucid fighting them. They might get suspicious if they see you coming in with us," Dream told him. "Just keep an eye out here. As soon as you hear my signal, run to us."

"Hurry up and go already," Cordyceps said, making a shooing motion at the two of them.
"They're gonna get suspicious if it takes too long for you guys to show up."

Giving Cordyceps a thumbs up, Dream grabbed Tommy by the arm and the two of them turned away from the group. Their boots clicked against the pavement and echoed off the skyscrapers surrounding them. The entire street had been shut down, so they walked in the middle of the road as they made their way down to the docks.

With every step, Tommy's heartbeat grew louder in his ears. This was what he'd been waiting for all day. This was the thing he'd been dreading for the past week. It was like ants were crawling under his skin, digging into his chest and screaming at him to turn around and run in the opposite direction.

But Dream kept moving forward, so Tommy kept moving forward. Dream with his smiling mask and green hoodie, Tommy with his frowning mask and red hoodie. They were nearly the same height, with Dream only having an inch over him.

In another life, maybe they could've been brothers.

Dismissing that thought as soon as it reared its head, Tommy shook himself off and focused on putting one foot in front of the other. They passed down another block, and in the distance, he could just make out the docks.

The smell of salt hung heavily in the air as they rounded the last corner. Waves lapped against the metal docks that jutted out into the water, large metal containers creating a labyrinth that Dream walked right into without any sense of hesitation.

The metal walls of the shipping containers loomed around Tommy, making him feel like he was a lab rat trapped in a maze, with the Syndicate as the scientists testing him. He resisted

the urge to shrink down, forcing himself to keep his head up and shoulders straight—just like Dream.

Soon, they reached the end of the maze as a ship came into view. And with that, Tommy also spotted the entire reason they were there in the first place.

Tommy wasn't sure what he'd been expecting. Maybe for them to be digging through a shipping container, searching for something like they had been in the warehouse. Maybe he was expecting them to have a hostage, or for Thanatos to be holding up a detonator like on the roof.

But there was nothing. Instead, Thanatos, Acheron, and Orpheus were just standing ramrod straight, staring at Dream and Tommy as they made their way towards them.

Like they had been waiting.

"Dream, funny seeing you here," Thanatos greeted, injecting fake laughter into his voice that made chills run down Tommy's spine.

Dream stopped walking when they were only a few yards from the Syndicate. Tommy froze right beside him.

"Heard you were up to something and didn't wanna miss out on the fun," Dream shot back, rolling his shoulders back as he reached for his sword.

"Funny what you hear through the grapevine sometimes," Orpheus commented, glancing between Tommy and Dream with something knowing in his eyes.

Shit. Someone had to have snitched. Had it been Dionysus?

"There are lots of ways to get information if you know where to look," Dream said, casually fiddling with the hilt of his sword. "Now, we can either do the usual bit where I ask you what's going on and you tell me to fuck off and we start fighting, or we can just jump straight into it. What's it gonna be?"

Acheron snorted. "You sound impatient, Dream."

"I've been waiting all day. I'm ready to just get this over with," Dream shot back, unsheathing his sword fully.

"Well then," Thanatos said, stretching out his wings behind him, "let's do it Dream's way then."

And then, in one swift motion that Tommy would've missed if he hadn't been watching, Thanatos lifted himself into the air before diving straight for them.

Dream immediately splintered into ten copies of himself, all running at Acheron and Orpheus. Tommy stumbled back as Thanatos flew straight towards him, ducking down right

as the villain swooped over his head.

"Aw c'mon, Lucid! You're not afraid of birds, are you?" Thanatos taunted, banking around and swooping for him again.

Cursing under his breath, Tommy jumped out of the way. Thanatos dropped to the ground, rolling to break his fall and rising back up to his feet in one smooth motion. His face wasn't visible under his veil, but Tommy could practically feel his smirk as he stalked towards him, stretching out his talons at his sides.

Readyng his baton, Tommy grit his teeth and thought back to his training.

Then, he lunged.

Unlike before, when keeping up with the Syndicate members had been an exhausting and near impossible affair, now Tommy found himself easily keeping up with Thanatos as he swung his baton at the villain. Thanatos ducked and dodged his hits, but he caught the edges of the villain's robes, and that was enough to send him off balance.

As Thanatos stumbled, Tommy whipped around and slammed his baton into Thanatos' wing. The villain cursed and Tommy bit back a grin of satisfaction. He kept going, slamming his baton into Thanatos' side and then towards his head.

Thanatos' hand shot up to catch the baton before it hit the side of his veil. His talons curled around the metal, and Tommy yelped when Thanatos wrenched the baton forward. He refused to let go and be disarmed though, so Tommy staggered forward. He yanked back, twisting Thanatos' arm backwards to try and break his grip.

Grabbing Thanatos' shoulder, Tommy kneed him in the gut, and the villain gasped as Tommy slammed him against the metal container.

Wrenching his baton out of Thanatos' grip, Tommy pressed the baton against his throat to pin him. Despite the fact that Thanatos couldn't see his face behind his mask, he still grinned and hoped Thanatos could sense it.

"Looks like you're pinned, Thanatos," Tommy mocked.

Thanatos didn't say anything for a moment. Then, Tommy felt something squeeze his shoulder, and his heart dropped into his stomach.

He'd been so distracted pinning Thanatos, he forgot Dream's number one rule for fighting him one on one.

"Never, and I mean never, let Thanatos get within reaching distance of you."

Thanatos had his hand on Tommy's shoulder.

His breath caught in his throat, and despite the baton pressing against his neck, Thanatos let out a choked laugh.

“Not so cocky now, are you, little hero?”

Tommy’s blood roared in his ears. Thanatos had a hand on his shoulder. If he wanted, he could kill Tommy right now.

The three leaders of the Syndicate dedicated themselves to Death. In one way with their names, but in another way being with their powers.

Orpheus was like a living ghost. Acheron could die and come back to life.

And Thanatos... well, he could kill someone with a single touch.

It wasn’t something Thanatos did often. In fact, there was only one recorded case of him ever using the ability on a hero. It had been a life or death situation for both of them, with the hero pressing a knife to his throat.

Then, the hero had just collapsed. Later on, the body was reported to have black veins running all over it, as if they had been poisoned.

Tommy imagined that for himself. His body swollen and bulging with ink black veins. Dream staring into his lifeless eyes as black tears ran down his cheeks.

He almost dropped the baton.

Almost.

“You don’t kill easily, Thanatos,” Tommy pointed out, struggling to keep his voice from trembling. “I have a baton to your throat, not a knife. I don’t think you’re going to kill me for that.”

“Are you sure about that?” Thanatos asked, and a talon traced the curve of Tommy’s mask. “You don’t know my code. You don’t know why I do what I do. All you know is that right now, your life is in my hands.”

Tommy gulped.

“Go on, call for your friend,” Thanatos encouraged him. “It might be time for some negotiations.”

While Tommy didn’t want to listen to a villain like Thanatos, he knew he wasn’t left with much of a choice here.

“Dream!” He shouted. “I need a little help here!”

Although he couldn’t turn around to see, he could hear the multiple Dream illusions stumbling at being called to.

“Oh fuck!” Dream said, the words being echoed by the illusions.

Dream needed to call for backup. Out of the corner of his eye, Tommy was able to see one Dream copy—whether it was the real one or not he couldn't tell—reach for the comms on his watch.

Suddenly, a deafening static sound echoed between the metal containers.

“What the fuck?!” Dream yelled, yelping as he (presumably) got hit by Acheron again. “Why the hell aren’t the comms working?”

No.

No no no. This couldn’t be happening. The comms couldn’t be down. That was supposed to be their signal!

Noticing the way Tommy had stiffened, Thanatos chuckled.

“It’s not difficult for Minos to turn off communication systems like that,” Thanatos taunted, and Tommy’s stomach dropped at the mention of the rarely seen villain.

Minos, a villain who could manipulate technology however he pleased. With all black eyes and a deadly sharp trident, he was considered extremely dangerous by the Committee. However, it had been nearly a year since the last time he’d been seen. He hadn’t even come up in conversation when Dream had been planning their backup.

If Minos was here, that meant either the Syndicate had just made a lucky guess knowing they would use comms for backup, or somehow they’d found out exactly what their plan was and knew to bring Minos to take the comms down.

Dionysus didn’t know about their specific plan. That meant they had a snitch within the Hero Committee itself.

While Tommy usually would’ve stopped to think about who it could be or how disastrous that was for the Heroes as an organization, considering his life was kind of being held hostage at the moment, it wasn’t the most pressing issue on his mind.

In the distance, Tommy heard something explode, and winced as he realized other Syndicate members must’ve ambushed their backup.

“It was a good effort,” Thanatos mused, his talons tapping against Tommy’s shoulder. “But you still didn’t prepare as much as you thought you did. You need to always expect the unexpected.”

And before Tommy could ask him what he meant by that, there was a flash of movement in the corner of his eye.

Then, Tommy felt something hard slam into the back of his head.

Blinding pain flashed through his skull. His vision went dark for a second as his legs fell out from under him. His hands slammed against the hard concrete, and his head was spinning as black dots danced over his eyes.

Tommy tried to stagger to his feet, but his limbs wouldn't respond. He collapsed again, his mask pressed uncomfortably against the hard ground. Blinking a few times to try and clear his vision, Tommy saw a pair of black boots step in front of him, followed by a metal pipe clanging to the ground.

Distantly, Tommy realized Orpheus must've snuck up behind him and hit him in the head to get him off of Thanatos. Fuck. He'd been so distracted by Thanatos, he forgot all about Orpheus.

"Is he okay?" Orpheus asked, though Tommy struggled to focus on his words.

Orpheus' jeans came into view as he crouched down in front of Tommy. He felt Orpheus' hand trace the edge of his mask, and although Tommy couldn't see his face, he heard his quiet hiss of sympathy all the same.

"Seems pretty out of it, but you didn't hit him hard enough to do any lasting damage," Thanatos replied, and Tommy felt something sharp brush against the back of his head.

Another wave of pain washed over his skull, and Tommy shrieked as he jerked his head away. The hand immediately retreated.

"Sorry about that, mate," Thanatos apologized, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut because his spinning vision was starting to make him nauseous. "I'd recommend just staying down for the rest of this. It'll be easier that way."

While Tommy wanted to tell Thanatos to fuck off, to stumble to his feet and launch himself at the villain again, Tommy could barely understand the words he was even saying. His head was throbbing, and his thoughts were tumbling off in five different directions at once. He was thinking about his own injury, he was thinking about Dream and wondering if he was holding up alright, he was thinking about their backup and hoping they could fight off whoever ambushed them well enough.

Tommy felt something warm and wet on the back of his head. Reaching a hand up, Tommy yelped again as more pain flashed through him. When he moved his hand back down, he saw it was stained red with his own blood.

If only Tommy could heal himself. That'd make his life so much easier right now.

But instead, all Tommy could do was lay on the ground, struggling to keep himself awake even though his eyes were growing heavy. He might not be able to get up, but he needed to know what was going on. He couldn't leave Dream alone in this.

Speaking of Dream, it seemed as though Acheron had finally gotten him pinned. All the illusion versions of Dream had disappeared, leaving only the real Dream pinned to the wall of a metal shipping container with Acheron's hand wrapped around his throat.

Orpheus and Thanatos walked towards Dream, completely ignoring Tommy on the ground. They clearly thought he was out of commission for the rest of the fight, and despite how badly Tommy wanted to prove them wrong, he knew he couldn't.

“Now Dream, with your sidekick out of the way, I think we’re long overdue for a civil conversation,” Thanatos said, folding his hands in front of him as he approached.

Dream struggled under Acheron’s grip, but Tommy noticed that Acheron had heavy gloves on. Likely to prevent Dream from using his powers on Acheron as he held him down.

“Stop fighting. It’s not going to do you any good,” Thanatos chastised, like he was scolding an unruly child. “You know what we want. Where the hell is he?”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re-”

“Don’t bullshit us, Dream. You took him somewhere, and we want to know where he is. Then, this whole mess can be over, and we can go back to our usual routine,” Thanatos said, his wings fluffing up behind him.

There was a beat of silence as Dream’s mask met Thanatos’ veil. Tommy waited for Dream to say something. Anything.

But he didn’t speak. After nearly a minute of that staredown, Thanatos sighed.

“Fine, you want to do it the hard way then? We’ll do it the hard way.” Turning back, Thanatos glanced at Tommy, and Tommy would’ve shrunk back if moving didn’t cause him extreme pain. “Are you familiar with the phrase ‘an eye for an eye?’”

“Yes,” Dream answered between gritted teeth.

“We’re going to do something like that. You seem to care a lot about that sidekick of yours, don’t you?”

A rock dropped into Tommy’s gut, and he watched Dream stiffen under Acheron’s hold.

“What are you going to do to Lucid?” Dream asked.

Thanatos let out a soft chuckle. “We don’t plan on harming him—well, not more than we already have. We’re just going to present you with a deal. We’re going to take Lucid with us, and if you want him back, you bring us our boy back. A simple trade, all in all.”

No. Fuck, no that couldn’t happen. If the Syndicate took Lucid, they’d probably unmask him. And if they unmasked him, they’d realize he was the one they were looking for the entire time. Then he’d just be back in their hold either way.

A small, frightened whimper slipped past Tommy’s lips without his permission. Thankfully, no one was close enough to him to hear it.

“You- You can’t do that!” Dream argued, panic seeping into his tone.

Acheron snorted. “You don’t exactly get a say in that.”

Dream struggled more against Acheron’s hold, but Acheron didn’t budge.

"Please! Don't take him!" Dream pleaded, and Tommy had never heard his mentor sound so desperate before.

"Then tell us where he is," Thanatos said, stepping closer so he and Dream were face to face.

Dream stopped struggling and stared at Thanatos. There was no answer he could give. Because the person they were looking for was the same person they were threatening to take. They just didn't realize it.

When Dream didn't respond, Thanatos huffed and stepped back. "Then it seems we've reached an understanding. Acheron, knock him out. And we'll get a move on."

Then, before Dream could say anything else, Acheron slammed him back against the container with a force that made even Tommy wince. Dream's head slammed against the metal, and Tommy watched with dread wrapping tight around his chest like a vice as Dream slid down to the ground, completely limp.

This was it.

Dream was unconscious, and Tommy was helpless.

It was over.

The three villains turned back around and started walking towards Tommy with determination in their steady gaits. As Acheron approached Tommy, he struggled to try and stand, but whimpered again when it sent more pain rushing through him.

"If you don't make this difficult on us, we won't make it difficult for you," Acheron told him as he kneeled down.

"Fuck you," Tommy whispered, his voice hoarse as Acheron lifted Tommy into his arms.

The villain was surprisingly gentle. He made sure to cradle Tommy's head in a way that didn't aggravate the injury, and the unexpected comfort made it all the more difficult for Tommy to keep his eyes open.

Sleep was nagging at him. Pulling at the edges of his mind and begging him to bury himself in the dark depths. Tommy knew you weren't supposed to fall asleep with a head injury, but maybe it was better that way. Maybe if he fell asleep he'd slip into a coma or something and not have to deal with the fact that he was being kidnapped by the Syndicate.

So as his head throbbed with every step Acheron took, Tommy decided his one last act of defiance would be to let himself drift off.

The last thing he remembered seeing was Orpheus flashing him a worried look as he slipped into the darkness.

thank my beta Darling for leaving you guys on a cliffhanger like this lol

anyway this is kind of the end of the first arc of this fic I think?? like, things are going to be pretty different than these first 6 chapters for the foreseeable future so I hope you enjoy the direction I take this with, because now we're finally getting into the part of the story I wanted to write this entire fic for!

if you want more content from me while you wait for the next chapter, I'm also almost finished with posting a crimeboys centric mystery/horror 'mini' fic called [under the brine](#) so check it out!

join my discord server! i answer questions and sometimes give out sneak peeks for upcoming stuff! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I have a playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)!

make sure to leave a comment telling me what you thought! (if you have questions please make sure you've read all my authors notes before asking bc there's like a 85% chance I've already answered your question in the authors notes of one of these chapters) I don't reply to most of them but I read them all and they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

captured

Chapter Summary

Tommy has been kidnapped by the Syndicate.

Chapter Notes

HELLOOOOO I bet you all didn't expect to see me again so soon!

well you see I've been wanting to write this chapter for AGES so I ended up speedrunning it (doo doo do do~) hence why yall are getting another chapter so very soon

this chapter basically sets up the next arc we have and I'm not sure if this is exactly where most of you thought we were going with this, so I really hope you guys like what I have in mind

TWs for this chapter: mention of a panic attack, mention of gaslighting, drugging (kind of?)

hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up with a throbbing headache.

The pain radiated out from the base of his skull, flaring around his temples almost like wings. He groaned as he stirred back into consciousness, his foggy mind struggling to remember what he had been doing to give himself such a nasty headache.

Thinking back, Tommy remembered the smell of salt. Lights glinting off of metal containers. A clawed hand gripping his shoulder.

Suddenly, it all came flooding back.

He'd been kidnapped.

Immediately, Tommy's eyes flew open with a gasp as he tried to stand up. But his wrists were held down, and Tommy realized he was tied to a chair.

Through the eye holes in his mask (Tommy was relieved to realize he was still wearing it), he could tell he was in a very opulent room. It seemed like someone's bedroom—ornate carpet, large windows covered with gauzy curtains, a four poster bed to his right—if Tommy didn't know any better, he'd think he was in a rich person's hotel.

But the part of the room that proved to him this wasn't a hotel was the man sitting in front of him.

Orpheus sat on a plush chair across from Tommy. He was lounging across the cushion, ankles crossed and arms stretched out behind him. His dark eyes narrowed when Tommy stiffened in his seat.

"I'm glad you're awake," Orpheus said, straightening up. "I was worried I might've hit you too hard."

"Wish I'd stayed asleep," Tommy hissed, wincing as his headache throbbed again.

If Thanatos had been here, Tommy would've expected him to be unbearably smug at having Tommy tied up in front of him. If Acheron was here, Tommy imagined he'd be ignoring him. But neither of them were here. Instead, it was Orpheus.

Orpheus, the leader of the Syndicate who confused Tommy the most. The one who never seemed to want to fight, yet was always standing by Thanatos and Acheron's sides anyway. The one who wanted to talk to Lucid one on one, the one who seemed genuinely hurt when Tommy called him a monster.

Of course, it had to have been an act. Tommy wasn't an idiot. But Orpheus was the best actor out of the three of them, that was for sure.

Now, Orpheus was looking at Tommy with the same worry in his eyes he had seen before he passed out. He looked Tommy up and down, his lips pursing into a thin line as he started to tap his fingers against the arm of his chair.

"I was told to watch you until you woke up," Orpheus said quietly, something unreadable in his tone.

Tommy scowled behind his mask. "Now that I'm awake, are you gonna tell Thanatos and Acheron so you can fucking torture me or whatever the hell you plan to do?"

Orpheus flinched. "We're not going to torture you."

"Yeah right," Tommy huffed.

Sighing, Orpheus dropped his gaze to the floor. "I'm supposed to alert Thanatos and Acheron now that you're awake." He paused, frowning. "I can't though. Not yet. There's... There's something I need to do first."

A rock dropped into Tommy's gut.

"We have a code of honor," Orpheus said quietly, "Thanatos and Acheron aren't planning to unmask you. And usually, I would agree with them."

Oh god. This wasn't going in a good direction.

"You're going to look under my mask?" Tommy asked in a small voice, his heart pounding out of his chest.

Still staring at the ground, Orpheus slowly nodded. "I just- I need to make sure my theory is wrong. It doesn't- I don't see how I could be right. Not at this point. But it's going to drive me crazy if I don't know for sure."

If Orpheus removed his mask, he'd recognize Tommy immediately. Then, it would all be over. Tommy would never be let out of the Syndicate's clutches again.

"Please don't," Tommy begged, hating the way his voice cracked with the plea.

Orpheus winced. "I'm sorry, but it'll just be me who sees you. You don't have to tell me your name or anything. I just... I *have* to be wrong. I'm not going to get any peace with myself until I know for sure you're not him."

With that, Orpheus rose to his feet. Tommy struggled against his ties, pleading with the universe that something was left loose so he could slip out before Orpheus could come near him.

But the universe was cruel, and Tommy found himself unable to move even the slightest bit.

Stepping over to the chair, Orpheus looked down at Tommy with a grimace. He didn't seem like he wanted to do this. Like this was just as painful for him as it was for Tommy.

But it wasn't. Tommy was the one at risk here. The second his mask came off, he had lost.

Orpheus brought his hand up to the strap on the back of Tommy's head. Forcing down a whimper, Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, wincing when the weight of the mask fell off his face.

There was a sharp gasp. And Tommy knew it was over.

"No..." Orpheus whispered, and when Tommy forced his eyes open, he could see the villain stumbling back from him. "No, this isn't- no, I was supposed to be wrong."

Tommy met Orpheus' eyes, unmasked, and willed himself to keep his expression as flat as he could.

Anger swirled with fear inside of him. They had him again. This wasn't supposed to be how things went. Dream was supposed to *protect* him, but Dream had failed, and now Tommy was right back in the hands of his kidnappers.

It wasn't fair. None of this was fucking fair to him.

Deciding to take advantage of the anger welling up in his chest, Tommy masked his fear with the red hot rage. He glared at Orpheus, meeting his eyes without flinching. If he was here now, he was going to make sure the Syndicate knew they weren't going to control him like they did in the past. He wasn't going to make this easy on them.

"Tommy?" Orpheus' voice cracked, and Tommy forced down the urge to flinch at hearing the villain say his name.

The mask, still in Orpheus' hand, fell to the floor.

"Tommy, what happened?" Orpheus whispered again, eyes welling up with tears. "What- We've been looking for you! This whole fucking time, we've been desperately trying to find you and just- why were you working with Dream?!"

Tommy gulped, and focused on the flames burning inside of him to keep his fear hidden.

"Dream *saved* me," Tommy hissed, narrowing his eyes at Orpheus. "Saved me from you fuckers. What, you thought I wouldn't want to get revenge on the pieces of shit that kidnapped me?"

And that-

Well, Orpheus flinched at that like Tommy had slapped him across the face. He stumbled back again, staring at Tommy with what looked like a mixture of shock and horror. Good. Let him be horrified that Tommy wasn't going to be their docile little pet.

"Kidnapped you?" Orpheus asked, wrapping his arms around his chest. "We- We didn't kidnap you, Tommy! What the hell are you talking about?"

So they were going to play this game, huh?

Tommy should've known. The Syndicate was going to try and lie to him. Try to convince him they'd been friends. That he wasn't a victim but was there willingly.

As if. Like he'd ever willingly help the fucking monsters that killed his brother.

"I'm not fucking stupid!" Tommy shouted, lunging forward in his seat against the restraints.

Tommy wasn't going to tell them about his amnesia. That would make it all too easy for them to try and plant memories in his head.

Orpheus stared at him silently for a few beats, and Tommy noticed the villain's chest was starting to rise and fall faster and faster.

"This- No, this can't be- I was wrong. I was supposed to be-" Cutting himself off, Orpheus twisted his fingers into his hair, and Tommy realized he was pretending to hyperventilate. "Phil! Techno!"

Tommy's heart skipped a beat as a door behind him swung open.

"Wil! What's wrong?" The man cut himself off, and when Tommy twisted his head around, he saw the unmasked forms of Thanatos and Acheron.

Thanatos was a middle-aged man with pale blond hair that fell to his chin, and stubble covering most of his jaw. His black wings were still fluffed up behind him, and when Tommy met his icy gaze, he saw Thanatos staring at him in shock.

Acheron seemed to control his emotions a bit better than Thanatos. His bright pink hair fell in loose waves around his shoulders, and his dark eyes were narrowed as they looked over Tommy. Refusing to be intimidated by the man, Tommy met his staring head on, trying to project as much rage as he could onto his face.

"Tommy?" Thanatos asked in a voice so soft, Tommy almost couldn't hear it over Orpheus' ragged breaths. "It's not... It's you? You're Lucid?"

Tommy didn't respond. He just glared at Thanatos, keeping his lips firmly sealed.

Silence hung heavily in the air between the four of them. Then, there was another sharp gasp from Orpheus, and that seemed to snap Thanatos and Acheron out of their dazes.

"Wil," Thanatos said, rushing towards Orpheus with his arms outstretched. "Wilbur, it's okay, just breathe."

Orpheus—Wilbur, apparently was his name—looked like he was on the verge of a full on panic attack. Thanatos wrapped his arms around him, and Orpheus had to duck down to reach Thanatos' shoulder because of their height difference.

"Phil, I got him," Acheron said, walking over to wrap an arm around Orpheus' shoulders.

Phil and Wilbur. What ordinary, stupid names for some of the most dangerous men in the city.

Nodding, Thanatos handed Orpheus off to Acheron. Tommy watched as Acheron guided Orpheus out of the room, leaving him alone with Thanatos.

Looking back at Thanatos, Tommy realized that he'd seen the man in his civilian form before. At Las Nevadas, he had been with the brunet man at the bar. And if that was anything to go by, the brunet man with him had likely been Orpheus.

Fuck. He was so stupid. They'd literally been there when they made their trade with Dionysus. He probably spilled everything to the two of them as soon as Dream, Hellion, Cordyceps, and Tommy had left the building.

"Tommy."

Thanatos' voice snapped him back out of his thoughts. The villain was staring at him with carefully crafted sorrow, like he had practiced how to look as depressed as fucking possible or something.

"You should tell Orpheus his acting is a little heavy-handed," Tommy shrugged, trying to look both pissed but casual at the same time. Anything but afraid. They couldn't know how much they terrified him. He couldn't hand them that kind of weakness.

Thanatos clenched his jaw at that. "What?"

"I mean, faking a panic attack? Really? You look a bit more convincing at least, looking all sad and shit. But Orpheus went a little far," Tommy explained.

And there was that sadness again. Sadness like Thanatos wanted to cry, but was also desperate for answers. His pale eyes skimmed Tommy's face, and after a few seconds of silence, he took a step forward.

Tommy flinched back, and Thanatos froze.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Tommy," Thanatos said softly.

Thanatos' words from before rang in Tommy's ears.

"All you know is that right now, your life is in my hands."

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "And I'm just supposed to believe that when you literally threatened to kill me a few hours ago?"

It was satisfying to watch Thanatos wince at the realization of what he'd done.

"I didn't know it was you at the time," Thanatos tried to explain. "If I had known it was you—"

"You wouldn't hurt me? You wouldn't have threatened me?" Tommy laughed, and it was a bitter thing that scraped the back of his throat. "That's such fucking bullshit, man. You fucking kidnapped me, and now you've kidnapped me again. You can drop the whole nice act."

Thanatos' pale eyebrows furrowed. He stared at Tommy like a puzzle he was trying to put together in his mind. His forehead creased, and he took another step forward. Tommy flinched again, but this time Thanatos didn't stop walking towards him.

"What did Dream do to you?" Thanatos whispered, bringing a hand up to Tommy's face.

Without thinking, Tommy turned and tried to bite at Thanatos' hand. Thanatos immediately yanked his hand back so Tommy's teeth only closed around air, but the threat was made.

"Don't fucking *touch* me!" Tommy snarled.

Blinking at him a few times, Thanatos dropped his hand. Then, he took a shaky breath, and turned away from Tommy.

"I... I need a minute," Thanatos muttered, turning and heading towards the door.

Tommy listened as the door clicked shut behind Thanatos, leaving him alone in the room.

Shit. This wasn't good.

So the Syndicate was clearly trying to go with the nice route. Gaslighting him into thinking they actually cared about him. Well, that wasn't going to fucking work. Tommy was going to wait out their bullshit. Once they realized he wasn't going to be convinced, they'd drop the act and then...

Well, what then?

Tommy was trapped. He kept trying to get out of the zipties on his wrists and ankles, but he was secured so tightly, he could barely even feel the blood flow to his hands. Besides, he could still hear the villains right outside his door.

Orpheus was still pretending to have a panic attack it seemed. Tommy could just barely make out gasps of, "I wasn't supposed to be right," and "what did he do to Tommy?" There was a deeper voice saying things too quietly for Tommy to understand, but as the seconds ticked on, Orpheus' gasping calmed down.

He waited. He waited and waited and waited, staring at the wall as he tried to guess what the Syndicate's next move was going to be.

Tommy wasn't sure how long he could go without telling them about the amnesia. They could ask him something specific about the last time he'd been there, and then when he wasn't able to answer, they'd know something had happened to his memories.

But that was a problem for future Tommy. If he told them on his own, that'd just be handing them all his weaknesses on a silver platter. No, he had to try and fake it for as long as possible.

Finally, after a few minutes of trying to think through his options, he heard the door open again.

This time, Orpheus and Thanatos were nowhere to be seen. Acheron stalked into the room, shoulders tense as he stood directly in front of Tommy's chair.

"According to Wil and Phil, you said we kidnapped you," Acheron said, staring down at him with piercing eyes.

"You did," Tommy spat, meeting Acheron's gaze.

Acheron paused for a moment, and although his expression didn't change, Tommy noticed his hand curl in and out of a fist. "Fine, we'll go with that for now. But there's still some stuff I'm missin' here."

Yeah, Tommy knew all about having stuff missing from a story.

There was silence. Acheron stared at him expectantly, but Tommy kept his mouth shut. He wasn't going to say anything else that might tip them off to his amnesia. He had to be careful

with this.

Seconds ticked on. Acheron's flat eyes bored into Tommy's, and he resisted the urge to squirm in his seat.

Then, finally, Acheron sighed and looked away. "I need to go talk to Phil."

And just like that, Tommy was alone again.

Outside the door, he could hear Acheron talking to Thanatos in low voices. They probably didn't realize Tommy could hear them through the walls.

"He's not going to talk, I can tell," Acheron was saying. "I think we're gonna need Niki."

Niki? Was that their interrogator? Tommy didn't think they would stoop to torture so soon, not when they were trying to keep up their 'nice' image.

"Are you sure? I don't want to freak him out," Phil responded, and Tommy tensed.

"Trust me, Phil. It's the easiest way to figure out what the hell happened," Acheron emphasized.

There was a sigh from Thanatos. "Fine. Give her a call and tell her to get over here as fast as possible."

It was then Tommy realized he couldn't hear Orpheus anymore, and figured he'd gone off somewhere else. Probably realized his whole performance was a bit pointless. Thank god. Tommy was getting annoyed.

This time, Tommy was alone in the room for much longer. Footsteps led away from the door, so Tommy assumed Acheron and Thanatos had left. Good. This gave him time to try and see if he could escape.

It wasn't like anything had changed from earlier. The bindings were too tight for him to slip out of. But he could look around the room to see if there was anything he could use to help him make his escape before they came back with their interrogator.

The room itself was, again, ridiculously nice. The chair Tommy was sitting in was made of a rich, dark wood that looked hand-carved. The shimmering, gauzy curtains obscured his view of the outside, but he could tell it was day, meaning he had been knocked out for quite a few hours. His head was still throbbing, but the pain had lessened quite a bit since he'd woken up, so he hoped that meant he wasn't going to have any permanent issues from it.

The four poster bed was draped in dark sheets that looked like they were made of satin or some other rich people shit. The room itself seemed completely barren of any personal touch though—save for the crow statues that littered the end tables and dark wood dresser.

This was probably some kind of guest room, if Tommy had to make a guess. It seemed a bit strange that they weren't keeping him in a proper cell, but Tommy had never heard of the Syndicate kidnapping people before, so they likely just weren't prepared for it.

Tommy's best bet for escape was the window. If he could shatter the glass, he could jump out. Sure, he had no idea how high up he was, but unless he was literally in a skyscraper, the worst he'd suffer was a broken leg from a three story fall.

Gritting his teeth, Tommy tried to jump across the carpet with the chair. Inch by inch, he tried to scoot towards the window, but the chair really didn't want to move across the plush carpet. Still, he had to keep trying.

One jump.

Made it an inch.

Another jump.

That was almost two inches.

A third jump- oh fuck, the leg of the chair got caught.

The dull pain in Tommy's head exploded as he slammed face first into the ground. He was still firmly tied to the chair, so the chair legs stuck straight up in the air while he was stuck underneath it. His cheek was smashed into the carpet, and he was pleasantly surprised by how soft it was.

It was the little things he had to focus on being grateful for. Because this really fucking sucked.

It didn't take long for his back to start to ache in that position. He was bent over in a really awkward way, and his lower back was screaming at how it was being pinched in just the wrong spot. Still, he refused to call for help. He wasn't going to let them get anything out of him.

Soon, the pain in his head died down again. But his back was screaming, and his muscles were aching at being strained in the most awkward of ways. Although there wasn't a clock in this room, he could imagine the quiet *tick tock tick tock* all the same. It was driving him a bit mad, sitting there listening to the passing seconds in his ears while he was in literally the most uncomfortable position he could imagine.

Tommy didn't want to say he was happy to hear the villains return, but there was a certain measure of relief that washed over him when he heard the door behind him click open again.

"Oh my god! Tommy!"

The chair was yanked backwards, and Tommy was righted once again by Thanatos. His cheek stung where it had been pressed against the floor, and he saw Thanatos reach out for his face again, but he stopped himself at the last second.

"How the hell did you manage to end up on the floor like that?" Thanatos asked, frowning at him.

"Isn't it obvious?" Acheron huffed from somewhere behind Tommy. "He tried to get to the window so he could escape, but the chair fell."

Thanatos winced at this, but didn't say anything as he looked between the window and Tommy before nodding to himself. Then, he took a breath and turned back around to face the door Tommy couldn't see.

"Niki, you can come in," Thanatos said.

Tommy stiffened, eyes going wide as his heart picked up speed again. This was their interrogator. Their torturer. He had to keep his resolve. He wasn't going to let them break him. No fucking way.

From the corner of his eye, a head of pink hair came into view.

The woman seemed young—likely in her early twenties. She had blossom pink hair that fell just a bit below her chin, and pale grey eyes lined with smudged eyeliner. Although Tommy was still a bit out of it from his head injury, he wasn't an idiot. Young woman with short pink hair involved with the Syndicate? It was obvious this was Circe without her mask.

Fuck. What the hell were they going to have Circe do to him to get him to talk?

When Circe's grey eyes landed on him, Tommy tensed in his seat, waiting to feel the blood be cut off from his throat like before.

But there was no choking sensation. Instead, Circe pursed her lips like she was struggling to keep it together as she looked him over.

"Tommy, it's really you," she said softly, looking him up and down.

"And you're Circe. You choked me the last time we saw each other," Tommy spat out.

Circe flinched at this. "If I had known it was you, I would never have hurt you like that."

Tommy scoffed. "And what are you gonna do right now? Ask me nicely about all the things you assholes wanna know?"

Both Thanatos and Circe stiffened at his anger, while Acheron kept a neutral mask perfectly slipped over his face.

Before they could respond, the door opened behind him again. Tommy twisted his head around and saw Orpheus coming back into the room with his head bowed and mask no longer on his face.

Like Tommy suspected, Orpheus was the brunet man at the bar in Las Nevadas. He didn't have his glasses on, and the glittering black makeup he usually wore with his mask still sat under his eyes. It was heavily smudged now, and the puffiness around his face told Tommy he had probably been crying.

Again, good actor.

Orpheus didn't look at Tommy as he sat on the edge of the bed, a bit behind where Acheron was standing. He folded his hands in his lap, and carefully avoided Tommy's gaze.

Fine by him. Not like he wanted to look at the bastard anyway.

Turning his attention back to Circe, he couldn't help but flinch back when she took a step towards him.

"I'm not going to hurt you," she told him in a gentle voice, so drastically different from the way she'd spoken to him the last time they fought.

Tommy glared at her. If she got her hand anywhere near his face, he was going to try and bite her just like he tried to bite Thanatos. His teeth were the only weapon he had right now, and if they didn't want him using them, they'd have to gag him.

But Circe didn't reach for his face. Instead, she brought a hand to his chest, her fingertips pressing right over his heart.

What was this?

Before Tommy could ask what she was doing, something very... heavy washed over him. His heart had been racing in his chest before, but suddenly it began to slow. His shoulders slumped, and his head tilted forward without his permission.

It was like he'd suddenly gone boneless. Despite the fear that had been racing through him this entire time, now he was completely relaxed. It was like he had been drugged, but the only thing touching him was Circe's hand on his chest.

He should've been terrified. It was as if he physically couldn't be scared though. No terror raced through his veins. No anxiety crawled up his throat. Slowly, his thoughts began to quiet as well.

"Wh... What did you do?" He asked, his words slurring without his permission.

"I'm helping you to calm down," Circe said in that soft voice of hers. "Mostly I've slowed your heartbeat down, which is encouraging you to relax."

"You're- You're drugging me," Tommy stammered, struggling to keep his thoughts straight.

"In a way," Circe told him.

Shit. He had to get out of this. He needed to... he had to get out... he should try and...

Trying to grasp his thoughts was like trying to grab water. Everything kept slipping, and the more his heartbeat slowed, the less aware he was of what was going on.

"I'm going to ask you some questions," Circe then said, and Tommy had to fight to focus on her voice. "Just answer as best you can."

Blinking a few times, Tommy tried to lift his head, but suddenly his skull felt like it weighed a hundred pounds.

“First question, how did you end up with Dream?”

He wasn’t- He shouldn’t answer. He wasn’t supposed to answer her questions because... why?

It was so hard to think. There was some reason he shouldn’t answer her questions but he felt so safe right now. Everything was warm and fuzzy. Why shouldn’t he just tell her?

“He rescued me,” Tommy slurred out, fighting to keep his eyes open. “Syndicate fucking... kidnapped me. He saved me.”

“How did he save you?”

“I dunno,” Tommy answered without thinking. “Don’t remember.”

Lifting his head for just a moment, Tommy saw Circe’s brows furrow.

“Why don’t you remember?”

No, he wasn’t supposed to answer this. He needed to not tell them about the amnesia because... because of the... shit, what was it?

“Tommy, why don’t you remember how Dream saved you?” Circe pushed.

There was some reason he shouldn’t answer that, but Tommy couldn’t think of why that was. It was just easier to give her the answers she wanted. He was so tired, maybe if he answered her questions she’d let him go to sleep.

“My head is all fucked up,” Tommy whispered, listening to his steady heartbeat in his ears. “Can’t remember shit. Amnesia.”

Distantly, Tommy heard someone make a confused noise. But he was too tired to care about who it was.

“How much did you forget?” Circe then asked.

Tommy shrugged, leaning forward until his head was resting on her shoulder. “I think... a year.”

“What’s the last thing you remember?” She continued, bringing her free hand up to card through his hair.

The motion was so soothing, if Tommy could purr, he would’ve done it right then and there. But instead he just made a pleased hum, and tried to think of how to answer Circe’s new question.

"I was fifteen, livin' a gross warehouse with mold and shit," he said, scrunching up his face when he remembered his old living conditions. "Next thing I know I'm waking up in an alley and Dream is saying he rescued me from the Syndicate. He told me the year and I didn't believe him."

"So you don't remember anything from being sixteen at all?"

Tommy shook his head, although it was hard with his forehead pressed against Circe's shoulder. "I get flashes... no faces though."

"What flashes do you get?"

The faint memories flickered through his foggy mind. The brown hair. The laughter. Once again, the ache of missing his brother flooded his chest, and in his groggy state it was a struggle to keep himself from tearing up.

"I think... I might've had a brother," he muttered. "But he's not- he would've looked for me."

The ache got worse as Tommy remembered Dream's words to him. About what the Syndicate would've done to keep his brother out of the way.

And suddenly, despite the fogginess in his head, Tommy remembered why he wasn't supposed to be saying any of this. This was the Syndicate, and they had killed his brother.

"You monsters killed him," Tommy said, his words slurring less as his heart started to pound harder, like it was trying to fight against Circe's influence. "Dream said you killed him."

Despite how slurred his voice was, he tried to put as much anger as he could into that last sentence. It seemed to have the intended effect, because Circe immediately pulled away, and Tommy whined when the hand in his hair disappeared.

Without Circe's hand on his chest, Tommy slowly felt his heart rate pick back up. The fog in his mind faded, and he straightened up in his seat, blinking owlishly as he came back to himself.

Thanatos, Acheron, Circe, were all giving him identical shocked expressions. Meanwhile, Orpheus had buried his face in his hands, and Tommy noticed his shoulders were shaking.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. He'd done exactly what he wasn't supposed to do. Now they knew everything.

"Don't think that just because I can't remember the last time you kidnapped me, I'm going to just go along with your shit," Tommy hissed, relieved his words weren't slurring anymore.

Circe and Thanatos both winced, while Acheron's jaw clenched. Orpheus didn't even look up.

"Niki, can you make him sleep?" Thanatos asked quietly. "I think we need to talk this out, and I don't want him to hurt himself trying to escape again."

Oh fuck that.

“Don’t you dare do that freaky shit to me again,” Tommy snarled at Circe.

That was terrifying. No one in the Hero Committee knew Circe had abilities like that. As far as they all knew, she could only control blood. (Technically this made sense given what they knew about her. If she could control blood, of course she could also control heartbeat. It just sucked that no one had made that connection).

Fuck. Circe might’ve been one of the most dangerous villains out there if she could control someone’s heart.

“I’m sorry, Tommy. I’m just going to make you sleep,” Circe said, reaching a hand towards him again.

He twisted his head to try and snap at her hand, but he was stopped by an invisible pressure in his head. Glancing up, he saw Circe had her other hand pointing at him, and realized she was using her blood manipulation to keep him from being able to move.

As she brought her other hand up to his chest, he gave her the meanest glare he could. She met his eyes and Tommy wondered how all of these villains seemed to be able to cry on command, because there were tears welling up in her eyes.

“Just get some rest,” she whispered in a thick voice, placing her hand on his chest again. Tommy tried to fight it, but her ability was far less subtle this time. His heart rate dropped, and his eyes quickly got too heavy to keep open.

In his last moment of awareness, Tommy felt Circe’s fingers card through his hair again, and wondered why water was dripping onto his head.



Tommy woke up with something soft under his head.

Blinking open sticky eyes, Tommy wondered why he felt better rested than he had been in weeks. His head was still throbbing, but it was a distant thing. His limbs were heavy with sleep, and when he tried to move, he found he was being cradled by the silkiest sheets he’d ever felt in his life.

It took him a few moments to realize what being in a bed meant. But as soon as it registered, he was bolting upright, marveling at how his wrists and ankles were completely unbound.

He was in the same room as before. The chair he’d been tied to had been moved back into the far corner of the room, and Tommy didn’t see anyone in there waiting for him to wake up.

Fucking idiots.

When Tommy jumped to his feet, he stumbled a bit, black spots dancing across his vision as all the blood rushed out of his head. He swallowed down the nausea that rose in his throat, grabbing onto the wall and counting his breaths until he steadied himself.

Once he was stable, he ran across the plush carpet. His shoes had been taken off, and his mask was nowhere to be seen. He was still in his Lucid outfit otherwise, but when he checked his pockets, he was disappointed to find his switchblade had been taken. (It wasn't sharp enough to do any real damage, but he could've used it to pick the lock.)

Running to the window, Tommy shoved the gauzy curtains to the side and realized it was now night out. Peering out, he saw he wasn't in a skyscraper, and was probably on the second story of a normal house.

Although he could only see a neatly-trimmed backyard, he made a guess that he was either in South End or Prime Heights, solely judging by how expensive the decor in this place seemed to be. If the Syndicate lived in Prime Heights... well that would be fucking ironic given how it was the most heavily patrolled place in the city.

Not bothering to waste anymore time trying to figure out where he was, Tommy grabbed the chair he'd been tied to and hoisted it into the air. His head throbbed at the sudden movement, but he gritted his teeth and pushed through it as he sprinted towards the window.

Once the window shattered, they would definitely come after him. Which meant he was going to have to jump out without even the slightest second of hesitation. That wouldn't be fun, but it was his only choice.

Now Tommy wasn't weak. Sure, he wasn't as strong as Acheron, but he wasn't a total wimp. So when he threw the chair, he knew it wasn't a weak throw.

Which was why he was so shocked when the chair bounced off the glass harmlessly, clattering to the ground with a deafening crashing sound.

"Dang, already trying to break the windows? You haven't even had to eat Wilbur's cooking yet."

Whipping his head around, Tommy's heart leapt into his throat when he saw Acheron standing in the doorway behind him.

"It was worth a shot," Tommy snapped, glaring at Acheron.

Acheron stared at him for a moment, his expression unreadable. He didn't seem upset, but he didn't seem happy with him either. Tommy wasn't sure if he expected Acheron to rush at him, but instead, the man calmly just shut the door behind him so both of them were fully in the room.

"You can try to escape as much as you want, but you're not leaving here," Acheron told him, folding his arms over his chest. "We need you to get your memories back."

"You mean gaslight me into thinking we were fucking friends or some bullshit like that," Tommy hissed. "Yeah, I'm not gonna fall for it, Acheron."

"My name's Techno," Acheron said, folding his arms over his chest.

"I don't care," Tommy shot back.

Sighing again, Acheron pinched the bridge of his nose. “Why did they pick me to do this?” He muttered. There was a beat of silence as Acheron collected himself, before he looked up to meet Tommy’s eyes again. “You’re not gonna believe me when I tell you we didn’t kidnap you, and that you weren’t being held here against your will, and that’s fine. Your memories will show you that we’re not lying.”

“Fuck you. I fucking hate all of you so goddamn much,” Tommy spat. “You’re monsters. Even if my memories come back and we were the best merry band of friends ever, I know what you’ve done. I saw you kill all the people in that building. I’m not going to change my mind about what you are.”

And *that* seemed to get Acheron.

For the first time since Tommy had seen him with his mask off, Acheron looked pained as his dark eyes met Tommy’s.

“Just... try to remember,” he said, in a voice far softer than anything Tommy had heard from the man so far. “Please.”

With that, Acheron turned around and left the room, and Tommy listened as the lock clicked shut behind him.

That should’ve felt like a victory. He’d gotten Acheron to leave him alone.

Tommy wasn’t sure why his chest was aching as if it was anything but.

Chapter End Notes

and here we are... Tommy needs to get his memories back lmao

I really really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter. our boy is FINALLY with sbi although it's definitely not a good thing (at least in tommy's mind). definitely let me know what you thought down in the comments! i don't respond to most but they really make my day :D

I'm also gonna be posting the final chapter of a crimeboys horror mystery fic of mine a bit later today, so make sure to check out [under the brine!](#)

I have a discord server! it's a fun chill place where I sometimes send sneak peeks at upcoming stuff so feel free to hop in! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I have a playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

love u guys <3

failed attempts

Chapter Summary

The Syndicate tries to help him remember.

Chapter Notes

hey guys i'm back! I would say sorry for this update being a little later than usual, but also it's literally only been 10 days since I last updated which really isn't that long so you guys can deal with it lol, but tysm for all the love you've given this fic so far! I hope you guys keep enjoying :D

anyway in case you didn't know, the reason I didn't get a chance to write the next chapter until a few days ago was because I was spending the past week writing for a challenge I was a part of! me and and a bunch of other super talented authors all participated in a fic writing challenge where we were given the same prompt, and wrote pieces based off that. at the time of writing this, all of our pieces are anonymous, and you guys can go through and try to guess who wrote what! the link to the collection is [here](#) so check it out and try to find mine!

ok so TWs for this chapter: paranoia, references to drugging, refusal to eat

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On the first full day of Tommy's imprisonment, he tried to escape.

Three more times to be exact.

Firstly, he tried breaking the window again, this time with a lot more force behind the chair he threw. It still didn't work, and Tommy was forced to accept the glass was bulletproof or some shit.

Secondly, he tried picking the lock on the door. It was easy enough to find a spare hairpin in the bathroom (probably from Acheron given how complicated all his stupid braids looked), so Tommy used it to try and jimmy the lock as best he could. But the lock wouldn't budge, no matter how many different ways he angled it.

Thirdly, he went for his most risky tactic. As lunch time neared, Tommy knew someone was going to come to bring him lunch. That morning, Thanatos had brought him a breakfast of pancakes and eggs, which Tommy had refused to eat on account of the fact that it might be

laced with something. The tray was still sitting on his bed, the eggs having gone rubbery long ago.

It didn't matter that his stomach was growling or that the sight of the pancakes made his mouth water. The food was almost certainly drugged, and he wasn't going to fall for a trick as stupid as that.

But either way, Tommy knew that if they brought him breakfast, they'd probably bring him lunch. Still trying to keep up their 'nice' act and all.

Admittedly, Tommy was wondering how long they would keep the whole bit up for. He had already made it clear he wasn't going to believe them, so he wasn't sure why they were still bothering. Guess they were just stubborn bastards.

Good thing he was more stubborn.

As Tommy waited next to the door, muscles tensed while listening for footsteps on the other side, he struggled to keep his mind from drifting. Specifically, he was having a hard time not thinking of Dream.

A part of him was curious about what Dream was doing right now. He obviously knew the whole 'trade' proposal was never going to work, since they'd both known Tommy was what the Syndicate had been looking for the whole time. But was Dream still trying to think of a way to get him back? He had to be. He had promised Tommy he wouldn't let the Syndicate hurt him again, and Dream wouldn't break that promise.

...he hoped.

No. Tommy shook his head to clear himself of the doubt. Dream wouldn't give up on him like that. Tommy couldn't think like that. Dream was his savior. Dream had said Tommy was *his*. He wouldn't just let Tommy go. He wouldn't.

But it's not like it would be easy for Dream to rescue him. Hell, Tommy didn't even know where he was. It was probably going to take weeks, maybe even months for Dream to figure out where he was, let alone make up a plan to get him out. And Tommy didn't want to stay here for months on end.

Which meant that he was going to have to get out on his own.

Tommy hid himself next to the door around noon, judging by the clock on the wall. However, the Syndicate took their sweet time getting him his lunch, because it wasn't until a bit past one that he heard footsteps coming down the hall.

His leg muscles—which he had been forced to relax when the waiting strained them too much—tensed again. He crouched next to the door, ready to jump as soon as it opened.

The footsteps slowed to a stop right on the other side of the door. Tommy's heart pounded in his ears as he waited.

On the other side of the door, he could hear someone's quiet breathing. Then, there was a soft sigh, and a voice muttering, "you can do this, Wil."

Oh great. It was Orpheus.

Tommy resisted the urge to roll his eyes at the man's dramatics. He hadn't seen Orpheus since Circe interrogated him, when he had kept his face buried in his hands and pretended to cry or whatever the hell he was doing. From what he could tell right now, it seemed like Orpheus was preparing himself to turn on the waterworks again, clearly not getting that it wasn't going to make Tommy anymore likely to believe him.

Suddenly, there was a squeaking sound as the doorknob twisted. Tommy sucked in a sharp breath.

As soon as Orpheus peeked through the door, Tommy lunged for the crack. Orpheus yelped in surprise, a box in his arms clattering to the ground as Tommy knocked into him, but before Tommy could shove his way past the man, he felt long arms wrap around his waist and yank him backwards.

"Fucking- Tommy, what the hell?!" Orpheus exclaimed as he dragged Tommy out of the doorway.

"Let go of me!" Tommy screeched, elbowing Orpheus in the side as he fought against the arms and making the man let out another yelp.

While Orpheus wasn't as strong as Acheron or Thanatos, he did have a height advantage over Tommy, which was frustrating to say the least. With a heaving grunt, Orpheus lifted Tommy off the ground, although Tommy could tell he was struggling to lift his weight.

"Let go of me, you piece of shit!" Tommy yelled, kicking his legs to try and get Orpheus to drop him.

Orpheus set him down a few feet from the door, but instead of letting go, he grabbed Tommy's wrists, pinning his hands to his chest. Tommy cursed as he tried to get out of the hold, but the way his wrists were angled made it impossible for him to move his arms, and after a few seconds of struggling, he let out a sigh of defeat.

"Are you done fighting me now?" Orpheus asked, not sounding angry with him but not sounding very thrilled either.

"Fuck you," Tommy spat, injecting as much venom into his voice as possible. But he stopped fighting, knowing it was pointless to keep going since the door had slammed shut during their scuffle.

Sighing, Orpheus dropped his hands, and Tommy winced as he rubbed at his wrists. Scowling at the villain, Tommy stalked back to his bed, huffing loudly as he dropped himself onto the edge of the mattress.

Now that Tommy wasn't fighting him, he could actually meet Orpheus' eyes. Unlike last time, there was no black makeup lining his eyes, and he wasn't wearing his usual dark clothes. Instead, he was just wearing a soft-looking yellow sweater, sweatpants, and black socks.

In short, Orpheus was in his fucking pajamas. It was kind of surreal to see.

"What do you want?" Tommy asked after a few seconds of silence passed between them.

Orpheus didn't respond immediately. Instead, he just stared at Tommy with that same kind of carefully crafted sorrow Thanatos looked at him with the day before. His brows were furrowed, and his jaw was clenched, as if it was painful for him to meet Tommy's eyes. At least he wasn't pretending to cry this time.

After a few beats of silence, Orpheus answered.

"I came by to see how you were doing," he said, his tone cautious as he moved back towards the door. Tommy watched with narrowed eyes as he crouched down, picking up the cardboard box he'd been holding before Tommy had jumped on him. He brushed off the top, taking a breath as he stared down at it, before walking back over to the bed. "Also, I wanted to give you this."

He held the box out between them. A silent offering.

"What is it?" Tommy asked, not reaching out to take it.

"It's just some of the stuff from your room," Orpheus explained, ducking his eyes to the ground as he said it. "Thought maybe having your old stuff might trigger some memories."

Your room. The implication that Tommy had his own room—one that wasn't the one he was staying in—wasn't lost on him. It was another tactic to try and make Tommy trust them. Telling him that he had his own room and his own things. That he wasn't a prisoner. That he had been happy here.

Again, bullshit.

Still, Tommy was curious to see what could be inside the box. It was possible he still was allowed to have some of his own things while he was kept captive here last time, so it wasn't that outlandish to think he might get some memories back from whatever Orpheus had brought him. And if Tommy got some of his memories back, he would be able to better tell when they were lying to him.

So after a silent moment of debate, Tommy took the box from Orpheus. While Orpheus didn't smile, his shoulders did drop in what seemed like relief, and then he stepped back to settle himself in one of the plush chairs across from the bed.

The box wasn't that large, and it wasn't heavy either. Tommy set it on the bed next to him, peering over the edge to see what was inside.

The first thing he pulled out was an old sweatshirt. It was navy blue and had some kind of map printed across the front of it. When Tommy looked closer, he realized it was a map of the country, and he frowned. That didn't seem like the kind of thing he'd buy. It was ugly as shit.

Without thinking, Tommy brought the fabric up to his nose to smell it. He took a deep breath, and was hit with a dizzying wave of familiarity. It smelled like lavender fabric softener with the faintest hint of sandalwood, and while no memories came flooding back into his head, he couldn't deny the *deja vu* he got from holding it in his hands.

He had definitely worn this sweatshirt at some point. That he could tell. But that still didn't answer the question of the map on the front.

"Didn't take myself for wearing a fucking map on my clothes," Tommy muttered, tracing the stitching with his finger.

"Um, yeah, that's because it was a hand me down you got," Orpheus said, looking nervous as he wrung his hands in his lap. "It was originally my sweatshirt, and then I gave it to you."

Tommy's jaw clenched at Orpheus' words. He stared at the sweatshirt in his hands, now knowing it had once belonged to Orpheus, who had given it to him. The idea that he had at some point worn Orpheus' old clothes wasn't something he liked to think about, and he quickly tossed the sweatshirt to the side.

Orpheus winced at the gesture. Tommy suppressed a smile at bothering the villain.

The next item in the box was a Nintendo Switch, not too dissimilar from the one Dream had that he used to let Tommy play with.

"Phil- uh, Thanatos, got you that as a gift," Orpheus explained, eyeing Tommy with a wary gaze, as if he wasn't sure if Tommy was going to chuck it at the wall.

While a part of Tommy didn't like the idea of keeping a gift from fucking *Thanatos* of all people, he had to admit, he was already starting to get bored waiting in this room for hours on end.

Tommy pressed the power button to turn it on. He watched as the screen flickered to life, with the first game loaded being *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*.

Orpheus was silent as Tommy clicked on the game, letting his save file load. Something clenched in his chest when he read the name *Big Man Island*, and while no concrete memories returned to him as he ran around the place, he had a vague sense of where everything on the island was. The museum was further up, he was trying to build the houses on the lower end, and it looked like he'd been working on an orchard on the left hand side.

He could feel Orpheus' stare weighing on him, waiting to see his reaction to the game. Tommy refused to show any hint of emotion on his face. It was harder than he thought it'd be, because the clenching in his chest only got worse the longer he ran around the island. This had been his game. His save file. His island. It was achingly familiar, and Tommy

wanted nothing more than to curl up and let himself slip back into doing his duties on the island.

But Orpheus was still here, and Tommy wasn't going to just cozy up with a video game while a fucking villain watched him.

Forcing himself to quit and save, Tommy shut the Nintendo off and set it to the side. Orpheus raised an eyebrow but didn't comment. He just waited as Tommy reached into the box for the last item.

It was a picture frame laying face down at the bottom of the cardboard. Tommy lifted it out and shoved the box to the side, before he flipped it over to see the picture inside.

Tommy froze as he stared at his own smiling face.

There were four people in the picture. There was Tommy near the front, looking like he'd been caught mid-laugh with his eyes scrunched up and mouth open in a huge smile. Acheron stood off to the side, a small smile barely hinting at the corners of his lips. He was shoulder to shoulder with Thanatos, who was grinning as he had one arm slung over Acheron's shoulder, and the other resting on Orpheus'.

And Orpheus... well, he was right behind Tommy.

Orpheus was draped over Tommy in the picture, chin resting on top of his head, arms resting loosely over Tommy's shoulders. He also seemed to be laughing about something, with a kind of mischief glittering in his dark eyes.

Tommy didn't miss how he was leaned back against Orpheus' chest in the picture. How his shoulders were relaxed, and his smile seemed completely genuine. His head was tilted back, like he was trying to look up at Orpheus with that wide grin stretched across his cheeks.

No. This... This wasn't right.

The longer he stared at the picture, the more his vision started to blur. There had to be an explanation for this. For why he looked so happy with the Syndicate. So relaxed.

Something acidic crawled up his throat. Tommy swallowed it back down, before forcing his mouth open to speak.

"What the fuck is this?" He asked in a rough voice, unable to tear his eyes away from the photo.

Orpheus rose to his feet again, approaching the edge of the bed with slow, measured steps. As if he was emphasizing every movement so he didn't startle Tommy. In a way, it made Tommy feel like he was some kind of wild animal Orpheus was trying to tame. Like Orpheus thought if he made one wrong move, Tommy would lunge up and bite him.

To be fair, Tommy would definitely bite Orpheus if he got the chance, so that wasn't an inaccurate assessment.

"It's a photo of us," Orpheus said softly. "It was the six month anniversary of you moving in with us, and Phil wanted to take a fam—" he cut himself off, lips snapping shut as he took a shaky breath in through his nose. After a beat, he released the breath and continued. "Phil wanted us to take a photo to commemorate it."

Bringing a hand up to the glass frame, Tommy ran his fingers over his own face. He traced the dip of his smile, the way his eyes were scrunched up around the corners and how he was wearing that stupid map sweatshirt that used to belong to Orpheus. He hadn't missed the way Orpheus almost said *family photo*, and for a moment, he wasn't sure how he felt about that.

If he focused, Tommy thought he could almost hear his laughter from that day.

Suddenly, there was a hand on his shoulder.

"Tommy—"

"Don't touch me!" Tommy hissed, slapping Orpheus' hand away and scrambling backwards on the bed.

Shit. Fuck. What the hell was he doing? He wasn't a fucking idiot! Pictures could be photoshopped, and even if this one wasn't, it didn't mean anything that he was smiling in the picture. They could've been forcing him to smile. Maybe they drugged him, so everything seemed funny to him. Or maybe Orpheus had a knife hidden in the hands he had draped over Tommy's shoulders in the picture, and Tommy had to laugh or else he'd get stabbed.

There were hundreds of reasons why he could be smiling in that photo that had nothing to do with what Orpheus wanted him to believe. The laughter echoing in his ears was just his imagination. His brain making things up because they were already getting to him. It wasn't real. It was just another lie.

"I don't believe this is real," Tommy told Orpheus, holding the picture frame up for the villain to see.

Orpheus winced. "Why not?"

"Because there's no way I'd be sitting and laughing with a bunch of fucking villains like this. Not unless I was drugged or being forced to pretend I was happy when I really wasn't," Tommy said, trying to ignore how unconvincing the reasons sounded when he said them out loud.

"C'mon, Tommy, please," Orpheus said, giving him a pleading look. "That's- For fuck's sake, that's real, man! You can see it for yourself! You were laughing and smiling, you were happy!"

"I don't believe it," Tommy repeated, squaring his shoulders as he hopped off the bed, walking over to Orpheus with the picture frame in hand. "I don't know how many times I have to tell you assholes, but I'm not an idiot. You're not going to trick me by playing nice."

"We're not tricking you though," Orpheus insisted, his voice cracking. "Please, Tommy, come on. It's me. It's Wilbur. You know who I am."

"I don't care what your goddamn name is, *Orpheus*," Tommy said, emphasizing the villain's moniker just for the way it made him flinch. "You're a horrible, horrible person. You've killed people, and I don't care how many stupid pictures you show me, I know myself. Memories or not, I know that I wouldn't have been friends with a bunch of monsters like you."

"But that—" Orpheus took another unsteady breath as he stepped back from Tommy, and Tommy could tell he was preparing himself to cry again. "That's not true! You never gave a shit about the stuff we did!"

And that-

That was one of the most bold-faced lies Orpheus had told him so far.

The implication that Tommy just *didn't care* about them hurting innocent people? No, Tommy wasn't like that. He was a hero for fuck's sake! The idea that he would just have been okay with that kind of stuff was one of the most ridiculous things he'd heard.

Anger flared bright and hot in his chest.

"You're a fucking liar!" Tommy shouted. "That's not true and you're not going to make me think it's true!"

"But Tommy—"

Before Orpheus could spout more bullshit, Tommy lifted the picture frame in his hand, and threw it against the wall with all the strength he could muster. He flinched back as shards of glass flew in the air, and watched as the picture frame fell to the ground.

It landed on its back. The glass was completely shattered across the front, obscuring the smiles of the four people in the picture.

Orpheus made a choked noise. Tommy knew that this was when he should smile. Should show Orpheus just how little he cared for this ruse. How he didn't believe any of this bullshit for a second.

But staring at the glass gouging into the picture right between himself and Orpheus, Tommy couldn't help but focus on the ache in his chest again. Even stranger, his eyes began to burn, like he wanted to cry.

He couldn't let Orpheus see him cry. Then the villain would know they were getting to him.

So Tommy swallowed down the lump in his throat, and slid on his best mask of neutrality as he turned to meet the villain's eyes.

"I'm not your fucking family, and I never will be," Tommy said, curling his hands into fists.

Orpheus stared at him with a deep anguish painted over his features that even had Tommy faltering for a moment. Then, Tommy noticed his shoulders were shaking again, and waited for Orpheus to put on some grand display of crying in front of him like he had the other day.

But instead, Orpheus turned on his heel before any tears could spill over onto his cheeks. Tommy was frozen as the villain left the room, not even thinking to make a dash for the door before it slammed shut behind him.

The ice that had encased his limbs in those few seconds thawed as soon as the door was closed. Tommy ran forward, pressing his ear to the door to see if he could hear what Orpheus was doing on the other side.

He heard footsteps trailing away from the door, and right before they got out of earshot, he heard what could've been someone slamming a fist against the wall.

Tommy scoffed again, trailing back to his bed and telling himself how annoying Orpheus was with his overdramatic acting.

He purposefully avoided looking at the shattered picture frame on the floor, not letting himself think about the burning still hiding behind his eyes. Instead, he picked up the Nintendo and turned it back on, settling himself onto the bed and loading up *Big Man Island* once again.

Something wet splashed onto the game screen. It took Tommy a beat to realize a tear had slipped down his cheek.

Scowling, Tommy scrubbed at his face, and went back to playing the game.

No more tears fell onto the screen after that.



Later that night, Acheron delivered him dinner. While Tommy was willing to try and bum rush Orpheus, he wasn't a complete idiot, and knew there was no point in trying to get past Acheron. So he stayed on the bed as the man came into the room with a steaming plate of turkey and mashed potatoes, trying not to look at the untouched remains of his breakfast.

Acheron noticed the breakfast though. He frowned, setting down the dinner plate on top of the tray and moving the pancakes off of it. Then, he glanced up at Tommy.

"You haven't eaten," Acheron commented.

He didn't say anything about Tommy's conversation with Orpheus. Either he didn't want to bring it up, or Orpheus hadn't told him. Tommy wasn't sure which one was better.

"I'm not letting you fuckers drug me," Tommy said, ignoring the hunger pangs radiating through his stomach.

Acheron sighed. "And I'm guessing there's no way I can convince you that's not what we're trying to do?"

Tommy shook his head, and Acheron pinched the bridge of his nose, right below where his glasses were perched. “You can’t just starve yourself.”

“Then let me go,” Tommy shot back, giving Acheron a saccharine smile.

“You know we can’t do that,” Acheron told him. “But we’re not just going to let you starve to death either.”

“Then bring Circe back here and have her use her freaky drug powers on me and force me to eat that way. You had no problem doing that to get me to do what you wanted before,” Tommy snapped, narrowing his eyes at the villain.

“Tommy, that was an emergency situation. We didn’t know what was going on with you, but it’s not something we want to do to you again,” Acheron explained, looking like he was exhausted, but also pained by this line of questioning.

A moment of silence hung between them. Tommy met Acheron’s dark brown gaze, and thought back to the picture that was still laying on the floor next to the bed. The way Acheron had actually been *smiling* in the picture. Tommy wasn’t even sure he could’ve pictured a smile on the villain’s face if he hadn’t seen that photo.

That same strange pain ached inside of him again. But instead of letting himself fall into it, he shoved the feeling down and focused on what was right in front of him.

Staring down at the dinner plate, Tommy ignored the way his mouth watered at the smell of garlic wafting up from the potatoes. The turkey was juicy, the mashed potatoes were perfectly fluffy, and Tommy’s stomach growled loud enough for both Tommy and Acheron to hear.

Instead of giving in though, Tommy looked Acheron dead in the eyes as he lifted the plate up, and dropped it onto the floor. The glass broke into three pieces as mashed potatoes splattered all over the expensive-looking rug that sat in front of the bed, and Tommy waited with bated breath for Acheron to react.

Acheron was silent. Tommy’s heart pounded in his ears. Acheron was going to get mad now. He was going to get mad and he was going to grab Tommy—possibly even hit him. It would hurt like hell, and they would finally be done playing this stupid game of make believe.

Tommy’s eyes didn’t leave Acheron’s. It was a silent challenge as he waited for the villain to make his move.

“Well, I’m not cleanin’ that up,” Acheron finally said after a few beats.

And before Tommy could think of how to respond to that, Acheron was turning around to leave the room.

“Wh- that’s it?” Tommy sputtered out without thinking. “You’re not pissed?”

Acheron glanced over his shoulder at Tommy and shrugged. “I mean, I didn’t buy that thing, so I don’t really care. You’re gonna have to take that up with Phil.”

Tommy blinked. “And he’ll be pissed at me?”

“I dunno, but probably not,” Acheron said, putting a hand on the doorknob. “We know what you’re trying to do, and it’s not gonna work.”

This made Tommy frown. “What do you think I’m trying to do?”

“You want us to get mad so you have evidence that we’re these evil kidnappers Dream told you we are. But it’s not gonna happen. No matter how many plates of food you spill, or how many picture frames you smash, we’re not going to stop caring about you, Tommy.”

It felt like Tommy’s throat was closing up. He wasn’t sure what emotion was causing it.

Then, without saying another word, Acheron left the room.

Like with Orpheus, as soon as he was gone, Tommy rushed to the door. He pressed his ear to it, and almost jumped when he heard two muffled voices talking on the other side.

“He doesn’t wanna eat,” Acheron was saying. “Thinks we’re gonna drug him.”

“I figured he might not. He’ll come around eventually I’m sure,” Tommy heard Thanatos reply.

Acheron snorted. “I think you’ve forgotten how stubborn he can be, Phil.”

“Believe me, I haven’t forgotten. But we can figure out ways to reassure him we’re not slipping anything into his food,” Thanatos said, and Tommy narrowed his eyes despite neither one being able to see him through the door. “Anyway, we have more pressing issues to focus on.”

There was a deep sigh. “Let me guess-”

“Yup, Niki accidentally let it slip that he’s back. So they wanna see him,” Thanatos told him, and Tommy stiffened at who ‘they’ could be.

“Should’ve figured,” Acheron huffed. “Well, there’s not much else to say except to let them come over tomorrow.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?” Thanatos asked, sounding unsure.

“Phil, I don’t think it matters if it’s a good idea or not. Those two will probably break down our front door if we don’t let them see him.”

It was Thanatos’ turn to sigh now. “You’re right. I’m just worried about how they’ll take it. You know Wil is having a rough enough time as it is.” There was a pause, and Tommy heard footsteps shuffling. “Speaking of, we should probably go check on him.”

“Yeah, probably a good idea. Make sure...”

Tommy cursed silently as both of their voices started to fade away. He pressed his ear to the door, straining to hear the rest of the conversation, but it was far too quiet for him to make anything out, and after a few seconds he couldn't hear anything at all.

Huffing, Tommy slumped against the door, sliding to the ground and bringing his knees to his chest. Apparently he was going to get two more visitors tomorrow. They were probably other members of the Syndicate that they were trying to convince him he was friends with, and he wasn't very excited to deal with more of that bullshit.

His eyes drifted to the mashed potatoes splattered over the ornate rug. The smell of garlic still hung heavily in the air, and Tommy grimaced when he saw slimy butter seeping into dark red and black fabric.

Maybe he should clean that up. It was going to stink the whole room up if he didn't, and since he couldn't open any windows, there'd be no way to air the place out.

Sighing, Tommy pushed to his feet and walked to the bathroom to grab paper towels. Then, he got to work cleaning up the remains of his dinner.



The next morning, Tommy was woken by rapid knocking at his door.

"The fuck do you want?!" Tommy shouted from under his blankets, not sure of what time it was, but feeling like it was way too early to deal with the Syndicate just yet.

"Can we come in?" An unfamiliar voice called back.

Tommy frowned, wondering who the hell was on the other side of the door, when the overheard conversation from the night before came rushing back to him.

An unfamiliar voice. We. The two people Thanatos had said wanted to come see him.

Bolting upright in bed, Tommy stared at the door with wide eyes. There were two members of the Syndicate he didn't know on the other side. Two villains he didn't know who were probably going to try and trick him into believing he knew them.

Shit. He needed to be more awake for this.

"Uh, can I just-" Before Tommy could scramble out of bed to go to the bathroom and splash water on his face, he heard the doorknob click as it was unlocked. Then, without warning, the door swung open and two men he definitely didn't know walked in.

Wait, not men. Boys. Teenagers.

Tommy gaped as two boys that looked to be the same age as him strolled into the room.

"Damn, bossman, you look like shit," the shorter of the two said in lieu of a proper greeting. The boy had hair that had obviously been bleached falling over his eyes, with dark brown roots coming in at the top of his head. Despite his short stature though, Tommy could see his

broad shoulders and the way his muscles filled out his dark green sweatshirt, and had a feeling the guy was a lot stronger than he looked.

“Tubbo! We haven’t seen Tommy in months and that’s the first thing you say to him?” The other boy scolded, lightly slapping the blonde boy’s arm.

The second boy was the polar opposite of his friend. Instead of being short and stocky, this boy was extremely tall—even taller than Orpheus, which was saying something—and looked like he’d get blown over by the slightest breeze. Shaggy black hair fell nearly to his shoulders, and Tommy noticed there were streaks of white scattered throughout it. Was that natural? Or just a really weird dye job?

“I’m just telling him the truth! He looks tired as hell!” The shorter—Tubbo apparently—fired back.

“Maybe you should’ve let me sleep more,” Tommy cut in, not enjoying watching this conversation about him happen right in front of his eyes.

The taller one winced. “Sorry, were you sleeping when we knocked?”

Tommy raised an eyebrow, gesturing to how he was still wrapped up in blankets. “What the hell do you think?”

“Um, should we come back later-”

“No, I’m already awake now so there’s no fucking point,” Tommy huffed, forcing himself to sit up a bit straighter. “So, like, before we go any further, who the hell are you guys?”

He was trying to play a guessing game in his head, going through the Syndicate members he knew and matching them to the height and build of these boys. But he was already so thrown off by the fact that they were the same age as him. He didn’t think the Syndicate had anyone that young working for them, but since these two were standing in front of him, they were clearly involved somehow.

Both boys seemed startled by the question, with the tall one blinking a few times in surprise, while Tubbo raised an eyebrow.

“Holy shit, you really don’t remember anything then?” Tubbo asked, taking a step closer to him.

Tommy shrunk back from the boy, and to his credit, Tubbo didn’t wince. But he did look taken back as he backed off.

“I don’t remember the last year of my life,” Tommy explained, frowning at them both. “Didn’t someone tell you guys that?”

“Well, yeah, Niki told us,” the taller one answered, wringing his hands in front of him. “But we didn’t, uh, know how intense it was or anything.” He paused, before his eyes widened. “Oh! I’m Ranboo, by the way. And this is Tubbo.”

“Sup,” Tubbo said, folding his arms over his chest.

“Uh, hi, nice to meet you guys I guess,” Tommy muttered, still frowning as he looked between the two of them. “So you’re part of the Syndicate?”

The two boys exchanged an unsure look, as if silently debating which one of them got the job of answering Tommy’s question. After a few beats of silence, Ranboo sighed, clearly having lost the battle.

“Kind of?” Ranboo began, shrugging a bit. “Like, we’re not, um, going out and doing stuff like the others do. But we’re involved in behind the scenes stuff I guess.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. They weren’t villains then. By association maybe they could be classified as that, but they hadn’t actually gone out and hurt others. Not to mention, they were *kids*. Just like he was.

It was then the realization as to what was going on with these two boys hit Tommy in the face like a brick.

“You guys were kidnapped too,” Tommy said softly, staring at the two of them with wide eyes.

Tubbo screwed up his face at that. “Wh- No, we weren’t kidnapped!”

Tommy sighed. “C’mon, it’s okay, we’re all in the same boat here. Guess I should’ve figured the Syndicate wouldn’t just settle for kidnapping one teenager, so it makes sense that you guys got-”

“Tommy, we weren’t kidnapped,” Ranboo insisted. “And neither were you.”

Oh great. So it seemed like these two had actually accepted all the bullshit the Syndicate had been feeding them. It was so blatantly obvious to Tommy now that these two were victims just like he was, but of course neither of them could see it.

Fucking hell. Tommy was probably just like these two in the past. Brainwashed by the villains to all hell and back, actually convinced they were staying there of their own free will. Tommy’s chest ached, both with sympathy for these two boys he barely knew, and with anger knowing that the Syndicate had done this not just to him, but to others.

He could tell by the expression on both their faces though that neither one of them was going to listen to him if he tried to explain his thoughts. They were both too far deep into the brainwashing, it would take time to convince them that they were victims, just like he was.

So instead of arguing with Ranboo, he just shrugged and leaned back against the bed. “You can keep telling yourself that if you want.”

“But Tommy-”

“Tubbo, maybe we should just drop it for now,” Ranboo said, cutting Tubbo off with a stern look.

Tubbo seemed like he wanted to argue, but after staring down Ranboo for a few beats, he sighed and shook his head. “Fine. Tommy, is it okay if I sit on your bed?”

“Uh, sure.”

With permission granted, Tubbo flopped onto the bed, before grabbing Ranboo’s wrist to drag him down as well. Tommy scooted back until he was pressed against his pillows, while Ranboo and Tubbo made themselves comfortable on the end of the mattress.

Rolling over so he was laying on his stomach, Tubbo rested his chin on his hands and shot Tommy a small grin. Ranboo, in contrast, just seemed sad.

“Can I ask you guys something?” Tommy asked after a few moments, figuring it was easier to meet Tubbo’s eyes instead of Ranboo’s forlorn expression.

“Shoot,” Tubbo responded.

“How old are you two? Because you look like you’re the same age as me.”

“We’re both older than you, but not by much, bossman,” Tubbo said, his grin getting a little more genuine. “Ranboo turned eighteen about three months ago, and I turned eighteen a month after him.”

Oh. So they were technically adults, but barely. Didn’t matter though. It’s not like there was that much of a difference between being seventeen or eighteen. Not to mention, Tommy had been with Dream when Tubbo and Ranboo both turned eighteen, and if he had been with the Syndicate for a year, and had also known these boys at the same time, that meant they had to have been kidnapped when they were still seventeen if not younger.

Tommy nodded, wrapping his blankets tighter around him. “Um, okay,” he muttered, trying to process this all in his head. “So I clearly knew you guys but what was... how well did I-” Shit, this was awkward to phrase. “I guess I’m trying to ask, like, what we all were.”

When he was around the Syndicate, it was so easy to be angry. To let his hatred of them cover up any strangeness he might have felt at them having known him during a time he couldn’t remember. But so far, Tommy didn’t have any anger for Tubbo and Ranboo. It didn’t seem like they were at fault for what happened to him. They weren’t the villains here. So without that anger, Tommy was forced to confront the fact that these two boys had *known* him. They had had an entire relationship that Tommy didn’t know the first thing about.

It felt weird, and Tommy didn’t know how to navigate this dynamic. It didn’t help that the longer he spoke to them, the more familiar they felt.

Ranboo and Tubbo exchanged another serious look. The smile fell from Tubbo’s face, and Ranboo pulled his knees up to his chest.

“I guess the easiest way to say it is that, uh, we’re your best friends,” Tubbo said quietly, letting the forced casualness he’d been wearing since he walked in the room slip for the first time.

Best friends. The word hit him like a punch to the gut, because Tommy never remembered being able to call someone his best friend before. Sure, he'd had casual friends at different schools or foster siblings he would've considered as being more than acquaintances, but never had he looked at someone and said they were his best friend. Nor had anyone ever called him their best friend.

And while Tommy knew he should be more suspicious of these two than he was, he couldn't help but want to trust them. There was some gut instinct inside of him, screaming at him that he knew them. He could relax around them. They weren't going to hurt him.

~~Maybe Tommy had gotten a similar feeling when he was talking to Orpheus the day before, but he didn't let himself acknowledge it.~~

"It's okay if you don't believe us," Ranboo said when Tommy didn't respond after a few moments.

Tommy shrugged, fighting the urge to hide his face in the blankets. "I dunno, I still think whatever the Syndicate is saying is bullshit, but for some reason I don't think you guys are lying to me."

Both of them perked up at this. "Wait, seriously?" Tubbo asked.

"I mean, I don't believe the whole not being kidnapped thing. But I believe you guys when you say we were best friends," Tommy admitted.

Sitting up, Tubbo crawled up the bed, and Tommy resisted the urge to jump off the bed as the boy got closer. Ranboo stayed at the foot of the bed, watching Tubbo with a wary gaze.

With Tubbo right next to him now, Tommy could see the warped scar tissue that marred the left side of his face. It had been partially hidden by his hair, but now Tommy could see the burn marks stretching down from his cheek to his neck, disappearing under the collar of his sweatshirt. While a part of him wanted to ask, Tommy wasn't that rude of a person, so he kept his mouth shut.

"We should, like, try to see if we can trigger any memories for you," Tubbo said, reaching out to tap the side of Tommy's head.

Tommy snorted. "Orpheus tried that yesterday by bringing me some old shit he said used to be mine."

Tubbo frowned. "Why do you call him Orpheus? I thought Phil, Techno, and Wil all told you their names."

"I'm not calling fucking villains like them by their names," Tommy hissed, that familiar anger rising up inside of him again. "I don't care what their names are. They're only Thanatos, Acheron, and Orpheus to me."

Another moment of silence hung heavily in the air. Tubbo blinked, something troubled flashing over his face, while Ranboo winced. Tommy could tell he said something neither of

them liked, but he wasn't going to apologize for being honest. Especially not when these two were too brainwashed to realize the truth of their situation.

After nearly a minute of dead air, Tubbo spoke up again. "Well, we can still try to see if you can remember anything about us."

Grateful for the change in topic, Tommy raised an eyebrow. "And how are you gonna do that?"

"I'm gonna ask you questions about us, and see if you can remember any of the answers," Tubbo quipped.

"I don't see how that's gonna trigger me to remember shit," Tommy frowned.

Tubbo shrugged. "I think it's worth a shot, and if you don't know the answer I'll just tell you anyway, so you can learn more about us."

Tommy blinked. Well, at the very least, this would help him learn more about his former best friends.

"Fine. Lay one on me," Tommy relented, slumping back into his pillows.

There was a pause as Tubbo tapped his chin, trying to think of a good first question. "When did we first meet?"

Snorting, Tommy rolled his eyes. "I have no fucking clue."

"We met about a month after you first started staying with Wil, Phil, and Tech," Tubbo told him, and it wasn't lost on Tommy how he phrased that like Tommy had chosen to be with them. "We've been with the Syndicate for a few years, and Phil pays for an apartment Ranboo and I share nearby. Wil invited us over one day, and you were here!"

Tommy frowned. Tubbo made it all sound so casual. He supposed in Tubbo's warped view of things, it was.

"What was the first thing you said to me?" Tubbo then asked, raising an eyebrow.

This time, Tommy did try to reach back in his mind to see if he could recall anything from that day. He searched the black void of his memories for Tubbo and Ranboo's faces, waiting for everything to just *click*. For the darkness to fall away, and everything to come rushing back.

But it didn't. He tried not to let the disappointment show on his face as he opened his eyes again.

"I don't know, but I bet it was something about how stupid your hair looks," Tommy said, opting for a joke to stave off the empty feeling inside of him.

To his surprise, the insult made Tubbo bark out a loud laugh. "That's actually exactly what you said!"

Tommy's eyes widened. "Wait, seriously?"

Tubbo nodded. "Yup! The second you saw me the first words out of your mouth were, 'it looks like you dipped your hair in a deep fryer'."

Despite not being able to remember the moment, Tommy couldn't help but laugh at hearing his own creative insult. That sounded exactly like something he'd say, and it was getting easier and easier to believe these two boys with every passing second.

"I bet I called you a tall bitch," Tommy then said, glancing at Ranboo.

Ranboo stifled a laugh into his hand. "Yeah, that's pretty much what you said." Then, he dropped his hand, and moved a bit closer to Tommy and Tubbo on the bed as well, sitting cross-legged across from Tommy. "Can I ask a question now?"

"Go for it."

Nodding, Ranboo tapped his chin in thought. "Do you remember what our powers are?"

Furrowing his brows, Tommy glanced between the two of them, filtering through powers he'd heard of before and trying to match them to either boy in front of him. After a few seconds though, he came up blank, and shook his head.

Tubbo gasped. "Oh! I call showing Tommy my powers first!" Tubbo said, scrambling over Tommy's legs to climb off the bed. He landed on the ground with a grunt, whirling around and taking a few steps back so there was some distance separating him and Tommy. "Tommy, I want you to throw something at me."

...huh?

"Huh?" Tommy questioned, wondering if he'd heard the boy wrong.

"Don't be a fucking pussy about it! Throw something at me!" Tubbo said, grinning like a madman.

Well, if he insisted.

Tommy looked at the nightstand next to the bed, seeing if there was anything throwable on it. He noticed an empty plastic cup he'd used to drink water out of the sink the night before, and figured that if it hit Tubbo in the face, it wouldn't hurt him too badly.

"Alright, man, but if it hits you in the face I'm not apologizing," Tommy said as he picked up the cup, although he knew he'd definitely still apologize.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. "Just fucking throw it already!"

Huffing, Tommy wound his arm back, and threw the cup hard enough so that it soared straight for Tubbo's face. He cringed back, waiting to see the cup slam into Tubbo's head, but then... it didn't.

Just before the cup hit Tubbo, something rippled in the air over him, and the cup bounced harmlessly off to the side. It clattered loudly as it hit the floor, and Tubbo grinned as Tommy gaped at him.

“Wh-”

“I have force fields, baby!” Tubbo announced, holding his hand up in front of him. It was then Tommy noticed that the slight ripple in the air around him was still there, and that Tubbo was pressing his hands against it, like it was some kind of invisible wall.

Holy shit. Force fields. Now *that* was a useful ability.

“That’s so sick!” Tommy exclaimed, abandoning his blanket cocoon as he hopped off the bed. “What kind of stuff can you block with it? How long does it last? Can a person walk through them?”

“I can block just about any solid object coming my way, although it depends on its mass and velocity. Like, I can block bullets, but it’s really hard and I can’t hold the shields up for long if I’m dealing with gunfire. Technically I could probably save myself if a car were to fall on me, but it’d be really hard and I’d only be able to keep it up for a few seconds at most,” Tubbo explained, matching Tommy’s bright smile completely now. “People are almost impossible for me to block out though. I once got you to bounce off the shield, which was pretty fucking funny to watch, but that’s the only time I’ve been able to block a person.”

“That’s so cool,” Tommy muttered, eyes trailing over the iridescent ripples in the air around Tubbo’s head. “Can you change the size, or does it only cover you?”

“I’m working on stretching it further out so I can cover other people,” Tubbo told him, the iridescent shield disappearing after a few seconds. “It’s still a skill I need a lot of work on though. Right now I can only cover me and Ranboo together for about two minutes at most, and it only works if he’s standing right next to me.”

Even with the limitations, that was a really cool power to have. At the mention of Ranboo though, Tommy turned to see the taller boy watching them from the bed still, giving him a more cautious smile.

“And what can you do, Ranboo?” Tommy asked.

Ranboo glanced around the room, and it was only then Tommy noticed the boy had two different colored eyes. One was a bright green, and the other was a brown so dark, it was almost crimson. “Uh, do you have any trash in here?”

Trash? Tommy looked around the room, eyes skimming over the broken picture frame on the floor. That probably counted as trash but... he didn’t want to focus on it again.

Instead, his eyes fell on the plastic cup he’d chucked at Tubbo. “I dunno if this counts as trash, but I doubt anyone’s gonna miss it,” he said as he picked it up off the floor, handing it to Ranboo.

Ranboo shrugged. "Good enough for me."

Before Tommy could ask what he was going to do with the cup, Ranboo set the cup down next to him on the bed. Then, he reached his hands into the air, and Tommy's eyes widened when the air between his fingers seemed to... tear open?

It was like a hole had been torn in the fabric of reality itself. Tommy couldn't do anything but gape as he stared into the black void that just sat in the air in front of Ranboo's face. It was a small tear, almost reminiscent of a black hole with the way there was only pure darkness inside. Except when Tommy looked closer, he realized it wasn't just pure darkness. There were small pinpricks of light, almost like stars, twinkling in shades of green and teal deep inside the hole.

Without saying anything, Ranboo picked the cup up and threw it into the hole. Tommy watched it float into the void, before Ranboo was pinching the sides back together, knitting the tear back up as if it had never been there in the first place.

The cup was gone, and so was the hole.

Ranboo smiled at him, and Tommy realized his mouth was hanging open.

"What the FUCK?!"

Chuckling at his reaction, Ranboo shrugged as Tubbo hopped up next to him on the bed. "I can kind of, uh, open up portals to another, um, dimension I think is the best way to put it?"

"We call it void manipulation," Tubbo explained, nudging Ranboo's shoulder with his own. "Ranboo can basically open up mini blackholes, except there's no gravity pull to them so it's not like a literal blackhole. We'd all be dead if that was the case."

"Are you fucking kidding me? You can open up the fucking *void*?!" Tommy exclaimed, mind reeling as he thought of all the ways you could use a power like that. "That's- Jesus fucking Christ, that's insane, man. You realize how insane that is, right?"

"That's actually not all I can do with it," Ranboo said, pushing off the bed.

Tommy frowned, and Tubbo reached out to grab his arm and tug him onto the mattress next to him. He didn't bother fighting the boy, instead keeping his eyes fixed on Ranboo as he walked into the center of the room.

"Don't, uh, try to follow me when I do this. I haven't figured out how to do this with other people yet," Ranboo told him, giving Tommy a pointed look.

Then, before Tommy could ask him what he meant by not following him, Ranboo reached down and tore open a much larger void this time. It was like he was pulling apart invisible fabric, straightening up as he created a tear large enough for his entire body.

"Sayonara!" Ranboo called, stepping into the glittering void.

“Wait, Ranboo!” Tommy scrambled to his feet, heart leaping into his throat as he watched the boy disappear into the darkness. Tubbo grabbed his arm to hold him back, and Tommy’s chest seized with fear as he watched the tear stitch itself back up, until there was no evidence of it ever having been there in the first place.

“Yo, Tommy, chill out,” Tubbo said, yanking him back down onto the blanket.

“Wh- How the hell are you so calm? He just disappeared into the fucking void!” Tommy yelled, still staring at the spot Ranboo had been standing in only moments before.

“He’ll be back in a minute. Don’t worry, he does this all the time,” Tubbo reassured him, patting his arm before dropping his hands back to his sides.

Shit. Yeah. This was Ranboo’s power. He knew what he was doing with it, even if it was kind of fucking terrifying to watch a guy willingly step into a blank void. Tommy wasn’t sure why it felt like his heart was going to pound out of his chest, and he started taking deep breaths to calm himself down.

Sure enough, after about a minute of silence, Tommy felt the bed dip behind him.

“Hi guys!” Ranboo said as he climbed out of another tear, dropping onto the bed and letting it seal up on its own behind him.

Despite the fact that Ranboo didn’t look any different than he had a few moments ago, Tommy noticed he was holding three bags of chips in his hands, along with two water bottles and a bottle of coke.

“Where the hell did you get that stuff from?” Tommy asked, frowning at the food items as Ranboo let them fall onto the blanket.

“I went down to the kitchen to grab them,” Ranboo explained, pushing a bag of chips and the coke to Tommy. “Techno mentioned you hadn’t been eating because you’re worried about them drugging you, so I figured you might be willing to eat some stuff that’s, like, sealed.”

At the reminder of his hunger, his stomach growled loudly, and he shot Tubbo a dirty look when he laughed. Picking up the bag of chips, Tommy turned it over in his hands, seeing that it was completely sealed just like Ranboo had said. The coke was sealed as well, and while Tommy was still hesitant to try anything from this place... well, he was really hungry.

“Thanks,” Tommy muttered, tearing open the bag of chips and shoving a handful of potato crisps in his face before he could think twice. He almost collapsed at how good it tasted, his stomach roaring to life at finally getting food again.

He finished the entire bag in less than a minute, and without saying anything, Tubbo and Ranboo both passed their own bags of chips to him as well. While Tommy didn’t want to take their own snacks, he was *really* hungry, and ended up snatching the bags and devouring the contents in less than a few minutes.

Then, he twisted open the coke bottle, sighing in relief when he heard the loud hiss of carbonation releasing. It really hadn't been opened before.

Tubbo and Ranboo didn't leave for the rest of the afternoon. No one knocked on the door, and Ranboo got some more sealed snack foods from the kitchen using his void travel. They stopped trying to ask Tommy about things he didn't remember, instead opting to tell him stories about things that had happened while he was gone.

He learned that Tubbo had a knack for building stuff, and was working on a device to help amplify his own force fields so he could have an easier time stretching them over other people. Ranboo could use his void travel to go pretty damn far if he wanted, but the longer he stayed in the void space the harder it was to reopen it, so he tried to limit himself to short distances. Both of them apparently also had code names within the Syndicate, but wouldn't tell Tommy what they were, with Tubbo insisting Tommy would remember on his own soon enough.

While Tommy avoided any questions about his time with Dream, he still found himself feeling more relaxed than he had been for the past few days. It was so easy to talk to Tubbo and Ranboo, and even though he didn't forget that they were technically still on the villains side, he found himself laughing along to their jokes and slipping back into a camaraderie he couldn't remember having before.

They left after the sunset, promising to come back as soon as they could. Once they were gone, Tommy couldn't help but think his room felt freezing without them there, and swaddled himself in blankets to try and fight back against the icy air.

Acheron didn't say anything that night when he delivered Tommy his dinner. But Tommy noticed that his dinner this time consisted of a protein bar, another bag of chips, and a sandwich in a plastic container. All of it was pre-packaged, like Acheron had gone out to a convenience store and bought the food just for him.

It was much easier for Tommy to resist the temptation for food when Tubbo and Ranboo weren't with him, but he felt fine after eating the chips from earlier. Considering the dinner food was still perfectly sealed, Tommy decided to forgo the growling in his stomach and tore open the packaging to eat.

It wasn't a victory he was handing to the Syndicate. He just needed to keep his strength up if he was going to figure out how to escape anytime soon.

He still didn't trust them. Not at all. Especially not now that he knew they'd done this to other teenagers like himself.

Tommy was going to get out of this place eventually. He was sure of it.

He just had to wait for the right opportunity.

AND NOW WE FINALLY HAVE TUBBO AND RANBOO ARE YALL HAPPY I TOLD YOU THEY'D SHOW UP

Tommy is very conflicted and trying to work out his situation as best he can... but hey at least we get bench trio! hope you guys like the powers I gave them, I had a lot of fun coming up with them

I have a discord server! sometimes I send sneak peeks at upcoming stuff and I also have a channel where you can ask me questions about my fics or my writing process or just about anything! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I also have a playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)!

let me know what you thought down in the comments! i don't respond to most but they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

routines

Chapter Summary

A routine develops.

Chapter Notes

hey hey peeps i'm back!!

so I've been getting some questions about updates and I wanna clarify I don't have a set update schedule for this fic. I'm a uni student and I'm very busy sometimes, but I try to update at least once a week. However, I don't know if people in this fandom don't know fanfic etiquette or not, but asking if this fic has been abandoned when it's been less than a week since I last updated it is not a very nice thing to do. I update a lot more frequently than quite a few authors, so thinking it's been abandoned because I haven't updated in, like, 3 days is very strange to me?? plus I don't have any intentions of abandoning this so just please don't ask that it's really getting on my nerves

anyway ty all so much for the love you've given this so far! I really hope you all keep enjoying reading it as much as I enjoy writing it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Several days passed, and Tommy noticed a routine begin to develop.

Some mornings, Tommy would wake up to sunlight streaming through his window, blinking open sticky eyes and washing out the bad taste sleep left in his mouth with the cup of water he had on his nightstand. Then he would get up, splash water on his face, and get dressed for the day despite the fact that he never left his cell.

It didn't look like a cell, what with the expensive furnishings and plush carpet, but it was a prison cell all the same. Tommy never let himself forget that.

The clothes he would wear had been delivered to him in a cardboard box by Thanatos. According to the villain, they used to be Tommy's old clothes, and unlike the sweatshirt Orpheus had given to him, these things actually did seem like clothes Tommy would wear.

A few pairs of jeans, some sweatshirts with colorful designs on them, and a few red and white t-shirts made up the majority of his wardrobe it seemed. The clothes all smelled like

the same lavender fabric softener he'd smelled on the sweatshirt, and every time he buried his face in the fabric of one of his hoodies, he'd be overwhelmed with the sensation of déjà vu.

After he was dressed, it wouldn't be long before either Acheron or Thanatos knocked on his door to deliver his breakfast. While he had tried to bum rush Thanatos once, the man had smacked Tommy in the face with his wing (it didn't hurt, but it surprised Tommy so much he fell flat on his ass when it happened), and after that Tommy figured it wasn't worth it to keep trying.

The only food he ate was the prepackaged stuff he knew hadn't been messed with. A few days after he'd started eating again, Thanatos had tried bringing him a freshly-tossed salad, but Tommy wasn't going to let his guard down that easily. Just because they hadn't tampered with the prepackaged food didn't mean he was magically going to trust normal food from them, so he shoved it back into Thanatos' arms without a single word passing between them.

Tubbo and Ranboo came back again to visit. Their second visit was similar to the first, except this time the two showed up with arms piled high with snack foods from their local convenience store. Tubbo didn't try to jog Tommy's memory this time, and instead the three of them huddled around Tommy's Nintendo, with Tubbo and Ranboo giving him their own suggestion for things he should add to his island.

Strangely enough, Orpheus didn't come by his room again after the picture frame incident. He didn't deliver Tommy any of his meals, he didn't stop by to try and talk to him again, and Tommy didn't hear his voice outside his door at any point.

A part of Tommy wondered if that was because of what he'd said to Orpheus the last time they'd spoken. He didn't feel guilty about it. Definitely not.

He tried not to think about it too hard.

On the fifth day of Tommy's captivity, Thanatos delivered him breakfast again, but he didn't immediately leave like he had all the other times before.

He handed Tommy a bottled smoothie, protein bar, some string cheese, and one of those plastic yogurt parfait cups. Tommy settled back against his pillow as he tore open the protein bar, and it wasn't until he had already taken a huge bite out of it that he realized Thanatos hadn't left the room.

Thanatos had settled himself in the same plush chair Orpheus had sat in when he'd given Tommy the box with the picture frame in it. Tommy still hadn't cleaned up the glass, so it still sat up against the wall, the shards glittering in the light of the late morning sun that fell through his window. Thanatos looked at it, but didn't comment before turning his gaze back to Tommy.

"This isn't a fucking mukbang," Tommy said after he swallowed, scowling at Thanatos.

"I understand. I just wanted a chance to talk to you. Figured we could chat while you were eating breakfast," Thanatos replied, giving him a painfully friendly smile.

Tommy narrowed his eyes as he put down the protein bar. “Here to gaslight me some more? Orpheus already tried and it didn’t work.”

To his credit, Thanatos didn’t make a face at Tommy’s accusation. Instead, he just let his smile drop, and turned his head down to look at his lap. “I just wanted to ask you about your memories.”

Stiffening, Tommy backed further into the pillows on his bed. “Don’t have them. Next question.”

“You’ve been staying here a few days already,” Thanatos continued as if Tommy hadn’t spoken, “I was curious if anything had come back yet.”

“I just said it hadn’t,” Tommy shot back.

“Really? Nothing at all?” Thanatos pushed, raising an eyebrow. “I’m not just referring to concrete memories, but things that, y’know, feel familiar?”

Gulping, Tommy thought back to the *deja vu* he got when he held the sweatshirt Orpheus had given him. Or the way he knew his way around his *Animal Crossing* island the first time he loaded the save file. Or how he trusted Tubbo and Ranboo right off the bat, (or the nagging feeling in the back of his head that made his chest clench every time he remembered what he said to Orpheus).

Looking away from Thanatos, Tommy curled his hands into fists. “No,” he lied. “Nothing.”

Thanatos didn’t need to know about these tiny things that barely counted for anything. Hell, he didn’t need to know if Tommy got all his memories back tomorrow. It was Tommy’s own mind, and they had no way of knowing how much he did and didn’t remember. If he started getting memories back, it might be better to pretend like he still didn’t know anything. Keep his cards hidden and take them by surprise if the need arose.

Yeah, that sounded like a good idea to him.

“You told Tubbo and Ranboo that you believed them about being best friends,” Thanatos pointed out.

Tommy’s eyes widened. Shit. He should’ve expected one of them to tell the Syndicate what he said. After all, even if they weren’t the monsters, they were still brainwashed by the group, and still held loyalty to them. He was going to be careful with what he said around either of them from now on.

“Yeah, I guess that’s true,” Tommy shrugged, trying to look nonchalant. “I got *deja vu* with them, but that’s about it.”

Thanatos hummed, bringing a hand up to push his hair back from his face. Tommy noticed that even though his wings were out right now, his talons were not, and Tommy eyed the pale, slim fingers that had threatened his life less than a week before.

"I've been doing some research into amnesia, and a lot of times when it comes to head injuries, you need cognitive rest in order to let your brain heal," Thanatos told him, icy blue eyes searching Tommy's face. "Did Dream give you any time to rest your mind after he found you?"

Tommy thought back to Dream finding him in that alley, with his head screaming in pain and Dream sounding just as confused as he was when he realized Tommy didn't know what year it was. After Dream had figured out Tommy couldn't remember jack shit, he had taken Tommy to his own apartment, and hovered around him for the next week asking him over and over what he could remember. Along with that, Tommy had been doing lots of research that week, trying to catch up both on what he had missed over the past year, and searching for any evidence as to what he had been doing.

It wasn't too long after that that Dream had first suggested Tommy start training with him. While Tommy had been grateful for the opportunity to get out of the apartment and actually do something, in retrospect that didn't really sound like it fit the bill for 'cognitive rest'.

"Dream helped me heal," Tommy answered instead, pressing the nail of his pointer finger into his thumb.

"But you didn't go on full cognitive rest," Thanatos said, narrowing his eyes at Tommy.

If Tommy lied about this, Thanatos would probably be able to tell. And if he suspected Tommy was lying again, he might bring Circe back to question him more. That was the last thing Tommy wanted to happen right now.

So he didn't argue with Thanatos' words, and instead just shrugged.

"I don't know if it's too late to undo the damage, but I hope that with some cognitive rest now, combined with being in a familiar environment, you'll start getting your memories back soon," Thanatos explained, giving him another weak smile.

Tommy rolled his eyes. "Maybe they will, maybe they won't. It's not gonna change shit."

Thanatos was silent for a moment. He dragged his hands down his face, and Tommy was torn between feeling proud for exhausting the man, and a strange ache that formed into a ball inside his chest at seeing the man look so defeated.

No. That was good. He wanted Thanatos to look defeated. He wanted him to look upset. If he wore them down enough, they'd stop lying to him, and everyone could end this goddamn charade.

"Tommy, can I ask you something?" Thanatos then spoke up after a few beats.

"You've already been asking me stuff," Tommy pointed out.

"Fair enough," Thanatos huffed, something that could've been a smile, but was more of a grimace flashed over his face. "But when Niki was here—" Tommy flinched at the mention of his interrogation, "-you said something about having a brother."

Tommy's breath caught in his throat. The brown hair and warm laugh flashed in his mind again, and he curled in on himself, struggling to take a breath to steady himself as his eyes began to burn.

It hurt being reminded of his brother. Grief would well up in his chest, only to light the spark for his anger as well, and it would create a strange swirling mixture of the emotions inside of him that made him want to do nothing more than *scream*.

When Tommy didn't say anything in response to Thanatos, the villain spoke again.

"Can you tell me what you remember about him?"

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "And why the fuck would I do that?"

"You accused us of killing him," Thanatos pointed out. "I don't remember you ever mentioning you had any family before you came to stay with us, so I want to see if I can figure out who you're talking about."

He... He shouldn't tell Thanatos anything. But at the same time, Tommy wanted to know what happened to his brother so badly. It was a desperation he could barely comprehend, something not just aching but *clawing* in his chest. This desire to know the truth. To find out what his blocked memories couldn't tell him.

"I don't remember much," Tommy admitted, staring at his hands. "I didn't have any blood family, you're right about that. I think he took me in when I was still on the streets."

Glancing up, Tommy saw Thanatos nodding along, listening with a neutral expression on his face. Good. If he was smiling, Tommy might've lunged at him.

"He, um, had brown hair," Tommy continued, frowning as he once again pounded his fists against the black wall in his mind. "And he liked music. I think he showed me a lot of music because sometimes I'll listen to songs I think I don't know, but suddenly I'm mouthing along to the lyrics like I do know them."

Thanatos pressed his lips together, almost like he was grimacing. "Was he an actual musician? Or did he just like music?"

Tommy shrugged, pulling his knees up to his chest. "I think he sang sometimes."

Nodding again, Thanatos tapped his fingers against the arm of the chair. "I see."

There was a moment of silence that hung between them. Tommy waited to see if Thanatos would say anything, if he'd give Tommy any concrete information about his brother now that he had details as to who he was.

Thanatos' expression was unreadable. He didn't seem happy, judging by the way his jaw was clenched and brows were furrowed. But it wasn't like he was angry either. And of course, there was still the lingering sorrow that seemed to undercut his expressions every time Tommy saw the man, but he was just ignoring that at this point.

"I'm not sure where you got it in your head that we killed him, but I don't think it was us," Thanatos finally said after a few tense seconds.

No that- that was impossible. Dream had said it himself. If his brother was around, he would've gone looking for Tommy. He *would've*.

Unless he just didn't care. Which was the other option Dream had mentioned. But Tommy knew that wasn't true. He couldn't explain how, but he knew his brother loved him and wouldn't have abandoned him like that.

Maybe it was Tommy's own denial. But in a way, it was easier to mourn someone's life than it was to be forced to recognize the fact that they never cared about you in the first place.

"You're a liar," Tommy spat, although the accusation was weak at best.

Thanatos didn't look at Tommy as he got up and made his way to the door.

"You're a fucking liar!" Tommy repeated, shouting this time. "My brother wouldn't just- he wouldn't have just left me like that!"

Something in Tommy's voice broke in the last part of his sentence, and he winced at the vulnerability in his tone. It seemed to bother Thanatos as well, the villain pausing with his hand on the doorknob.

There was a beat. Then two.

Resting his head against the doorframe, Thanatos squeezed his eyes shut and let out a deep sigh.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," he said softly.

And without providing any further explanation than that, he opened the door to the room and slipped outside, the lock clicking shut behind him.

All Tommy was left with was the sound of a half-remembered song echoing in his ears, and a tight ball forming right where his heart should've been.



The day after his talk with Thanatos, Tubbo and Ranboo stopped by for a third visit.

"So, like, hypothetically, do you guys think I could jump off a building and live?"

Tommy blinked once. "What the *fuck*, Tubbo?"

"I think it'd depend on how tall the building is," Ranboo responded at the same time.

"Wh- No, why the fuck are you gonna go jump off a building?!" Tommy asked, frowning at his friend.

Tubbo shrugged, taking a bite of the chip in his hand. “To test my force fields. I can repel objects with it, but I’ve never tried seeing what the effects would be if I jumped off of something high up.”

“So you really think starting with a multi-story fall is a good plan?” Tommy questioned.

“I mean, I guess I could start off smaller, but that’s so boring!” Tubbo exclaimed, falling backwards onto the bed. “Imagine if I could jump off the top of a skyscraper and land unharmed! It’d be sick!”

“Starting out small doesn’t mean you can’t try out skyscrapers later,” Ranboo pointed out, leaning against the bannister of the bed and taking a sip of his soda.

Huffing, Tubbo rolled his eyes. “Well then where do you propose I test it out? It’s not like I can test it jumping off the fucking bed.”

“Big rock?” Tommy suggested.

“Ranboo, are there any big rocks nearby?” Tubbo asked, glancing at Ranboo.

Ranboo furrowed his brows. “Uh, I’m not sure. Maybe in the park?”

Suddenly, Tubbo’s face lit up with an idea. “Oh wait, I got it! The park has a playground, right? What if I climbed to the top of the whole thing and jumped off?”

“If it doesn’t work you’re gonna break your leg in front of a bunch of ten year olds,” Ranboo deadpanned.

Once again, Tubbo shrugged. “They gotta learn the ways of the world early, bossman.”

The answer caught Tommy so off guard, he huffed out a laugh while sipping his own drink, and accidentally inhaled some of it. He gasped when the soda went into his lungs, and began to cough loudly as his chest screamed in protest.

Tommy was laughing as he choked, because Tubbo couldn’t just say things like that. But he did. He did and it was terrible but fucking hilarious at the same time. His lungs ached the longer it went on, but Tommy couldn’t remember the last time he laughed this hard. It felt... good. Relieving, almost.

By the time he’d caught his breath, Ranboo was patting his back while Tubbo had started looking up nearby parks on his phone. While Tommy had tried to sneak a glance at the map app before, Tubbo wasn’t an idiot, and kept his phone covered every time Tommy got near.

It was a bit annoying to be reminded that despite how easy it was to sit and laugh with Tubbo and Ranboo, they still weren’t with him. Not in the way he wanted them to be. It was only their third visit, so Tommy knew he shouldn’t expect to be able to get through to them about their brainwashing yet, but it was frustrating to say the least.

Tubbo and Ranboo had come over roughly two hours earlier, once again bringing a huge collection of snacks with them. They had gotten into a discussion of different powers after

Ranboo had thrown out all their trash by dropping it into one of his reality tears. That had led to talking about power limitations, which resulted in their current conversation topic.

Conversation with Tubbo and Ranboo was wonderfully easy. Despite the fact that Tommy didn't remember their past friendship, it was like they had picked up exactly where they left off—which was of course largely due to the fact that Tubbo and Ranboo didn't tend to acknowledge his amnesia if it wasn't relevant to the conversation. It just... flowed.

This was also exactly why, in contrast, talking to the two boys was ridiculously difficult for Tommy. Things flowed so easily, he had to constantly be on guard about what he said. So many times he caught himself right before he made a slip up mentioning something personal about Dream, or insider information about the Heroes that the Syndicate couldn't know.

Tubbo and Ranboo felt safe. He wanted to think they were safe. But they weren't, and he couldn't forget that.

"Tommy?"

Startled out of his thoughts, Tommy blinked when he noticed Tubbo waving a hand in front of his face, and realized he'd zoned out.

"Huh?"

"I asked if anything had gotten better with your powers lately," Tubbo repeated, and Tommy immediately frowned at the question.

"What do you mean by better?" He asked. Was something wrong with his powers before Dream rescued him?

"Y'know, how you feel a shit ton of pain every time you heal? Figured that since you were with the heroes for a while, they might've found a solution to that whole bit," Tubbo explained, leaning back against the pillows at the head of the bed.

Although they hadn't talked about Tommy's powers until now, he wasn't surprised the two boys seemed to know about them. He assumed the entire Syndicate knew what he could do, and was honestly surprised it hadn't come up earlier.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "My powers aren't broken. I can heal injuries perfectly fine, so there was nothing to 'improve' about it. I just have to deal with the pain."

"So the heroes had you healing them knowing full well you could feel the pain of the injury?" Ranboo cut in, quickly putting down his soda.

"I had a job, and I did it. It's not like I wasn't doing the same fucking thing the last time I was here," Tommy snapped, folding his arms over his chest.

Both Tubbo and Ranboo startled at this. Tubbo looked confused, while Ranboo's frown immediately softened, sympathy flickering through his eyes.

"Tommy, do you think you were a healer for the Syndicate?" Ranboo asked in a quiet voice.

"Um, yeah? Why the hell else would I have been kidnapped?" Tommy said, wondering what the hell Ranboo was getting at.

Tubbo buried his face in his hands, shaking his head like he was exasperated by what Tommy had just said. Meanwhile, Ranboo's sympathy only grew, his expression twisted into something sad.

"You weren't a healer for the Syndicate," Ranboo told him gently. "We all knew how much pain it caused you, and no one wanted to put you through that."

Oh great. More brainwashing bullshit.

"Yeah, okay, sounds totally believable," Tommy scoffed, scooting away from Ranboo when he tried to scoot close to him. "Literally why the hell else would I have been kidnapped if it wasn't for my powers?"

"Because you weren't kidnapped, Tommy!" Tubbo suddenly burst out. Tommy jumped back at the yelling, not used to hearing anger like that from his friend.

"I don't care how many fucking times you say that, I'm not an idiot!" Tommy shouted back, glaring at Tubbo. "I was kidnapped, and you two were too, and you're just too fucking brainwashed by the Syndicate to realize that!"

"For fuck's sake, Tommy! Why the hell would the Syndicate kidnap you when they already have their own healer?!" Tubbo shot back.

And-

What?

The scowl fell from Tommy's face, quickly replaced with open-mouthed shock as he tried to process what Tubbo said. The Syndicate... had a healer? That wasn't him?

That- no, that didn't make sense. There would've been no reason for the Syndicate to kidnap him if they already had a healer. Plus, there were no records of any known members of the Syndicate having healing powers. It didn't add up.

"That's not- That can't be fucking true," Tommy hissed. "You're making shit up to confuse me."

"We're not lying, Tommy," Ranboo told him, his soft tone a sharp contrast to Tubbo's bristling. "We have a healer in the Syndicate. I don't know if we're allowed to tell you their name, but we've both met them."

If Tubbo and Ranboo were telling the truth, that meant Tommy's power wasn't the main motivation for them kidnapping him. Which could only mean there was something far darker and more twisted than he even imagined in the first place going on here.

Or maybe his powers were still a part of it. Maybe this healer's powers weren't as strong as Tommy's, so they wanted someone who was better. Or the Syndicate could've just wanted

two healers instead of one. It was never a bad thing to have more than one person around who could fix up a stab wound.

The racing of Tommy's heart slowed as he rationalized this new information. That made more sense. Not... not whatever Tubbo and Ranboo were implying.

"Then I guess they just wanted two healers instead of one," Tommy shrugged, and Tubbo let out a loud groan.

"I swear to fucking--"

"Tubbo," Ranboo jumped in, resting a hand on Tubbo's shoulder, "maybe we should let it go for now."

Tubbo frowned and opened his mouth to protest, but Ranboo leaned in to whisper something into his ear before he could say anything. Then, as if a switch had been flipped, Tubbo's shoulders dropped, and the storm brewing in his eyes disappeared.

"Fine, I'll drop it," he muttered, folding his arms over his chest.

Tommy frowned, not liking when they whispered right in front of him. But he also knew that if he asked, Ranboo probably wouldn't tell him what he said. He couldn't trust them, and they couldn't trust him. It was just an unfortunate fact none of them said aloud, but they all knew it was true.

An uncomfortable silence enveloped them then. Ranboo picked up his soda again, Tubbo took another chip out of his chip bag, and Tommy... Tommy wasn't sure what to do.

The easy atmosphere from earlier was gone. Now a stormcloud hung above all their heads, dark and swollen with the promise of thunder. A part of Tommy wanted to make the cloud grow, to push the subject until lightning flashed and they all got soaked from the resulting downpour.

But Tommy also knew he couldn't push them too much. It wasn't their fault they couldn't see the truth, and he had to try his best not to blame them for that.

It didn't make it any less frustrating though.

Sighing, Tommy dropped down against his pillows, figuring it was pointless to try and fight the silence. At the very least, if this became a waiting game for who would talk first, Tommy knew he wasn't going to be the one to break. He thought back to one time when he and Tubbo had gotten into a ridiculous fight when one of Tubbo's latest inventions had electrocuted Tommy. It didn't do any lasting damage, but Tubbo got mad at Tommy because Tommy wasn't supposed to be messing with his gadgets in the first place. Tommy then argued that he should've put a sign up or something saying not to touch them, and things had gotten so out of hand they glared at each other from opposite sides of the room for nearly an hour before Tubbo finally cracked-

Wait.

Bolting upright, Tommy gasped as he replayed the memory in his head. The *memory* of that stupid argument with Tubbo. It wasn't from the past week. Although he couldn't remember when it happened, he knew that it- it-

That was a memory. A real, whole memory.

The room they'd been sitting in was unfamiliar to Tommy. It was much less opulent than his cell, but it was still nice, with off white walls and a bed covered with a bright red comforter. The more he tried to focus on the details, the fuzzier the picture in his head got, but he was pretty sure he could see video game posters hanging above the bed.

Holy shit.

He'd gotten a memory back.

For a moment, he wondered if that was it. That was the trigger to give him everything back. He sifted through his mind, trying to see if he could recall anything else—with Tubbo and Ranboo, or the Syndicate, or just anything really—but he quickly found himself hitting the wall again.

It was just that memory. That one, lone memory of a stupid argument with his friends, happening in a room he didn't recognize but felt strangely familiar to him all the same.

How had he felt in that memory? He remembered being mad at Tubbo, annoyed at the lingering sting on his hand, and frustrated at having made the gadget spark in the first place when all he'd done was pick it up. But it was strange because in a way, the emotions almost felt like someone else's. While he knew they were his, they didn't feel like they were. It was like he was watching the scene play out through a stranger's eyes.

He was Tommy in the memory, but he wasn't at the same time. Not the Tommy he was now.

"Tommy? Are you okay?"

Ranboo's voice cut through Tommy's frantic thoughts, and he whipped his head up to see the boy looking at him with worried eyes.

Tommy realized that he'd bolted upright and then just stared at his hands, silent as he'd gone over the single memory in his mind's eye. Of course Tubbo and Ranboo would be confused by that.

Opening his mouth, Tommy prepared to tell them that he'd gotten a memory back. But then he glanced at Tubbo, hearing his angry shouting in his ears again, and slammed his mouth shut before he could get any words out.

Shit. He couldn't tell them. Despite how badly he wanted to, anything he told them would get reported back to Thanatos.

So despite the excitement bubbling up in his chest at finally having gotten *something* back from the blank void in his mind, Tommy dug his nails into his palm, and forced himself to swallow the words down.

"I'm fine," he said, his voice only the slightest bit hoarse. "Just thought I heard someone outside in the hall."

Ranboo frowned, and so did Tubbo.

"I didn't hear anything," Tubbo told him.

"Yeah, I think I just imagined it," Tommy lied, curling his hands in and out of fists. "Anyway, um, I think you two should go for today."

He didn't want to send them away. Especially not now. Not when he finally had *proof*, however small, that they really had been his friends at some point in the past. Friends that were close enough to get into stupid arguments and have it mean nothing in the end, because they wouldn't let something that small come between them.

But Tommy knew that if they stayed here any longer, the temptation to tell them would only grow. He needed to process this alone, without his two friends watching over him.

Ranboo's face fell. "Tommy, c'mon, we don't have to talk about the whole—"

"No, it's not about that," Tommy said, shaking his head. "We're done with that conversation. I just- I have a headache."

Tubbo narrowed his eyes, clearly doubtful. "That came out of nowhere."

Tommy shrugged, avoiding meeting Tubbo's gaze. "Well sorry I can't justify my fucking headache to you, man."

While Tubbo seemed like he could tell Tommy was full of shit, Ranboo once again put a hand on his arm to keep him from pushing the issue further.

"We'll head out then," Ranboo said, pushing off from the bed and tugging on Tubbo's arm to get him to follow. "Try to get some rest, Tommy."

"I will," Tommy nodded, the lie tasting like sand on his tongue.

With one more pull from Ranboo, Tubbo got off the bed as well. They both waved to Tommy as they headed out, and within seconds, the door was clicking shut and Tommy found himself alone.

Dragging his hands down his face, Tommy groaned as he fell back against his pillows.

"You know you're not allowed to touch my shit! You could've broken it!"

"Broken it? It fucking electrocuted me, Tubbo! That shit hurt!"

"Why the hell do you think I told you not to touch it?!"

"You should've put a fucking sticky note on it or something!"

"Tommy, if I put a sticky note on anything saying 'TOMMY DO NOT TOUCH' that would just make you want to mess with it more."

"That's- well, okay, that's actually kind of true, but I think you need warning labels or something."

"Oh my god-

The argument replayed in his mind. Tommy batted his fists against the mental block in his head, clawing to try and get more than just that single moment. But all he could remember was sitting in that room with the white walls and red bed, glaring at Tubbo and wondering why he was being such a bitch.

Tommy wanted more memories to come back. But at the same time, the more he focused on the strange dissonance between the memory version of himself and the Tommy he was now, the more anxiety crawled up his throat at the idea of his memories returning to him.

What if they were all like that? What if Tommy got his entire missing year back, and he didn't recognize the person he was during it?

~~What if they weren't lying, and Tommy really hadn't been kidnapped? What if he really didn't care about the terrible things they did-~~

No. That- That couldn't happen. He was a good person who would never approve of what those monsters did. That's how he'd been before he lost his memories, right? He'd been a good person who hated villains for the way they hurt others.

...that wasn't true though. From what Tommy could remember during his time on the streets, he hadn't really given a shit about any hero and villain conflicts that arose. He just tried to stay out of the way when fights got close to his hideout, but never really had the energy to worry about anyone besides himself.

But that was just because he'd been homeless and hiding from CPS, when the simple act of waking up in the morning was a struggle for him. He was too busy worrying about keeping himself alive to focus on other people.

That was understandable, right?

⊕

That night, Tommy dreamed of his brother for the first time since he'd been kidnapped by the Syndicate (again).

Much to his frustration, even though he'd finally gotten a full memory back earlier that day, this dream was little more than the flashes he'd long since grown used to.

Singing. There was someone singing along to a quiet guitar.

A hand ruffling his hair. Tommy laughing as he slapped the fingers away.

Pressing his face into a soft sweater. Warm arms pulling him close to someone's chest.

Tommy woke up to a dark room with hot tears flowing down his cheeks.

Blinking a few times, Tommy sat up, his limbs heavy with sleep as he stretched his arms above his head and listened to the joints pop. A glance at the windows told him it was still nighttime, and judging by how sticky his eyes were, he probably hadn't been asleep that long.

His chest ached more than it had in ages. He could hear his brother's song in his mind, and although he couldn't make out the words, the tune was painfully familiar all the same.

His arms and back tingled where his brother had wrapped him up in a hug. If he closed his eyes, it felt so real that Tommy could almost pretend he was right next to him. This faceless figure who meant so much to him, even when he didn't even know his name.

The déjà vu was so much stronger than it had been before. Sitting in the dark, Tommy tried to imagine his brother's voice. Immediately, a very distinct voice popped in his mind for the man, and Tommy almost smiled at how easy it was to hear him crack a joke Tommy couldn't remember the punchline to.

Almost smiled.

To Tommy's horror, the voice that his mind assigned to his brother was one he recognized as soon as he imagined it. It wasn't on purpose, but Tommy recoiled into his blankets when he realized his mind had given his brother *Orpheus'* voice.

That was horribly wrong. Tommy didn't want to imagine his brother with the voice of one of the people who killed him. It was unthinkable, and Tommy shook his head violently to rid himself of the sound.

But in his half-asleep state, it was near impossible for him to shake the connection once his mind had made it. It wasn't right- it *wasn't*, but his brain seemed convinced that it was.

Tommy hated the way tears burned in his eyes when he heard, "*it's okay, Toms. I got you,*" echoing through his mind in Orpheus' gentle voice.

He hadn't seen Orpheus in days. Tommy was glad for this. He was glad that he didn't have to deal with that dramatic bastard trying to get Tommy to sympathize with him. Trying to trick Tommy into thinking he cared about him.

It was a good thing he hadn't seen Orpheus. He was happy about it. Happy.

Tommy didn't like how it felt like he was trying to convince himself of that fact.

A hot tear rolled down his cheek and landed on his hand. At the same time, Tommy heard something squeak outside his door.

Whipping his head up, Tommy could just faintly see a shadow moving in the light creeping from the hallway under the door to the room. If he listened closely, he could hear feather light footsteps pacing back and forth right on the other side of the wood.

His heart lodged itself in his throat. For some reason, his mind immediately jumped to the idea that it was Orpheus. For a brief moment, Tommy wanted nothing more than to call the villain in. To listen to his voice and imagine it as his brother's.

But Tommy shook his head to rid himself of that thought. He didn't want to see Orpheus. Orpheus was a terrible person through and through. The fact that Tommy was having traitorous thoughts like these was proof that their brainwashing was already starting to get to him.

So instead of calling to invite the person in, Tommy opened his mouth to shout something else instead.

"I can hear you outside, asshole! Can you leave me alone so I can get some fucking sleep?!"

He was relieved for the rough edge to his voice his grogginess had given him. It hid the way his voice cracked, his attempts at trying to sound angry faltering with so many conflicting thoughts swirling around his head.

The steps cut off, and the shadow under the door froze. Tommy waited for the figure to respond while his heart pounded in his ears.

Then, after a few tense seconds of waiting, the shadow disappeared and the footsteps faded away. Breathing a sigh of relief, Tommy collapsed back onto the mattress, and buried the heels of his palms into his eyes until he saw fireworks exploding behind his eyelids.

It took nearly an hour, but when Tommy's mind finally quieted enough for him to fall asleep again, he didn't dream. That was probably the greatest gift his subconscious had given him in months.

Chapter End Notes

tommy is Struggling

btw a bit of what Tommy is dealing with regarding the memory with beedu he got back is emotional dissonance! I've researched a few accounts of retrograde amnesia, and I've heard that sometimes even when people get memories back, they can feel disconnected from the emotions and the person they were in the memory. this isn't the case with every memory, and this isn't going to be the case with every memory tommy regains, but it is going to be a talking point in this story so I want to clarify I'm not just pulling it out of my ass here lmao

on that same note, I do have logic behind tommy's memories and how they're coming back/when they're coming back. it'll become more obvious in a few chapters, but a lot of it has to do with tommy's own mindset regarding his memories

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed! really glad we're finally getting into the juicy bits of this fic, I'm so excited to dive deeper into this. make sure to leave a comment telling me what you thought! they really make my day <3

I have a playlist for this fic! check it out [here!](#)

I also have a discord server! it's just a chill place where people can hang to talk about my fics <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

one step back, two steps forward

Chapter Summary

Tommy finally gets a chance to get out of his cell for a little while.

Chapter Notes

hello lovely people! I come to you with more of superheroes vs supervillains: but they're all really sad

anyway I wrote pretty much this entire update last night, and I'm so excited for you to read it. it's probably one of my favorite chapters I've written for this so far, it made me very emotional

so without further ado, I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

More days passed. Tommy didn't get any more memories. The routine continued.

It was more than a little mind-numbing at this point. Sometimes, Thanatos or Acheron would come try to talk to him, but they never stayed for very long (not that Tommy wanted them to or anything, the minute they entered the room it became Tommy's mission to get them to leave as soon as possible). The only people who would stay for more than a few minutes at a time were Tubbo and Ranboo, and they didn't come by every day.

Having his Switch helped at first, but there was only so much *Animal Crossing* a man could take before he started getting a little stir crazy. So when one day, Acheron came into his room and asked if he wanted to do some training together, even Tommy's anger at the villain wasn't enough to keep him from accepting the offer.

"Don't even think about tryin' to run," Acheron told him as he opened the door to the hallway, gesturing for Tommy to walk through it. "You won't get very far, I can promise you that."

Again, despite Tommy's desperation to escape, he wasn't an idiot. If it had been Thanatos or Orpheus who was taking him down to train, then yes he absolutely would make an escape attempt. But Acheron? No, Tommy really didn't feel like getting his shit rocked that hard, thank you very much.

"I'm not gonna go anywhere," Tommy grumbled, glaring at Acheron even though he was struggling not to bounce on his heels. After nearly two weeks in that tiny room, Tommy was finally outside of it. Restless energy hummed through his veins, and as soon as Tommy stepped through the door, he had to fight the urge to not go sprinting down the hallway. Not even as an escape attempt, he just wanted to *move*.

The corridor was large, with polished wood floors, beige walls, and two paintings—one of flowers with blackened petals, and another of a skull wrapped in vines. The floor was cold against Tommy's bare feet, but he wasn't sure if that was why he shivered as Acheron placed a hand on his shoulder to guide him out of the hallway.

The hall was short, and opened up to a small space with two doors on adjacent walls, a wide window overlooking the same backyard Tommy could see from his own window, and a staircase leading down. Both of the doors were unmarked and plain white, but for some reason, Tommy couldn't stop looking at the one that sat directly across from the staircase. For some reason, the door drew his attention, and he had an inexplicable urge to run over and try to open it up.

But with Acheron's hand firmly gripping his shoulder, Tommy didn't dare try it. Instead, he let his eyes linger on the door for just a moment, before following Acheron down the steps.

The downstairs opened up in several directions. To the right, Tommy could see sage green walls encompassing a cozy looking living room—with an emerald green couch, plush black rug, and a large TV sitting at the front. To the left, Tommy could make out some kind of dining room that looked like it hadn't been sat in for quite a while, if the dust coasting the dark wood table was anything to go by.

Despite Tommy's curiosity at exploring more of the house he was being kept prisoner in, Acheron kept a tight hold on him, guiding him straight off the stairs and to a plain wood door that sat right behind the first set of stairs. When Acheron opened the door, Tommy saw—guess what—another set of stairs!

Jesus fucking Christ, how many floors did this place have?

Tommy's question was soon answered when he descended the second set of stairs, the air growing cooler and darkness enveloping them both when the door clicked shut behind them. Judging by the lack of windows, Tommy guessed this was a basement, and briefly wondered if Acheron had finally gotten sick of his shit and decided to interrogate him under the guise of 'training'.

But then, the hand briefly left Tommy's shoulder, and the lights flickered on.

"Holy shit."

It was a training room. Admittedly, it wasn't nearly as big as the ones they had back at the Hero Tower, but it was still pretty damn nice all the same. Numerous pieces of exercise equipment sat against the backdrop of brick walls, with a few black training mats thrown over the hardwood floors. On the wall, Tommy could see a myriad of weapons hanging up—

swords, axes, throwing knives—and recognized two of the swords immediately as Acheron's signature weapons.

"Welcome to the training room. There's a passcode on the door, so don't bother trying to make a break for it," Acheron drawled, gesturing lazily around the space as he meandered over to one of the training mats. "So for sparring do you wanna do hand to hand, or do you wanna grab one of the staffs we have over there?" Acheron continued, pointing to the corner where there were four wooden staffs leaning against the wall.

Tommy eyed Acheron's broad shoulders, having grown all too familiar with the sensation of being pinned by the man. He didn't even want to think about what it would feel like to get punched by Acheron, so he turned to grab a staff without a word. He also grabbed a second one, and as he stalked back to the mat, tossing it to Acheron without bothering to warn the man.

Acheron caught it with ease, although he shot a dirty look at Tommy for not calling out his throw. Tommy met his eyes with his own flat stare, and the two didn't break eye contact as they each moved to opposite sides of the mat.

Maybe Tommy should've been more nervous. But after spending so much time cooped up, being somewhere else already had adrenaline humming through his veins. Not to mention, this was a great outlet for his anger at the Syndicate. If he played his moves right, he might be able to even give Acheron a black eye. That would make him feel great.

"Fencing rules, first to tap the other's chest wins the round," Acheron declared, rolling his neck as he readjusted the grip on his staff.

"Sounds good to me. Let me guess, those were the rules when we 'used to do this'?" Tommy asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm. He was sure that Acheron was going to try and convince him this used to be a regular thing they did together—sparred like old friends or whatever the hell they wanted him to believe. It was another obvious tactic to try and make him feel like this was familiar, to get him to trust them.

To his surprise though, Acheron frowned. "We've never sparred before. At least not in training."

Tommy blinked. That would've been such an easy lie to try and tell him. "Why not?"

"You didn't know how to fight before. If you had asked I would've taught you, but you weren't really interested," Acheron shrugged, before tightening his grip on the staff. "Now you've been trained."

Huh. Well, that wasn't that surprising to Tommy. Outside of the scraps he'd gotten into with foster siblings or when he was living on the streets, he'd never had the opportunity to learn actual fighting techniques. At least, not until Dream had taken him in.

Still though, he was confused why Acheron didn't try to lie to him about that. Guess he just knew Tommy wouldn't believe it?

Tommy's thoughts were quickly cut off when Acheron rushed at him, startling him back into the present as he swung his staff up to block his chest. Acheron slammed his staff on top of Tommy's, and Tommy flashed back to his first fight with Acheron—pinned against the wall, with Acheron's blade pressing down on his staff. This was an eerily reminiscent moment, except it wasn't nearly as difficult for Tommy to push back against Acheron's weight.

Acheron stumbled back, and Tommy narrowed his eyes.

"Don't go fucking soft on me, Acheron. You've fought me before, I know you hit harder than that," Tommy snapped.

"You sure?" Acheron asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, I'm fucking sure." Then, before Acheron could respond, Tommy rushed at him. He ducked under Acheron's swing, aiming for his legs and slamming the staff into his calves as hard as he could.

Hissing, Acheron stumbled but didn't fall. Then, Tommy felt something hard and wooden smack against his back, making him yelp. He straightened up and backed off, blinking a few times to try recenter himself.

Pain blossomed in his stomach. Tommy gasped as all the wind was knocked out of him, and he wheezed as the staff then slammed against his arm. In one swift motion, Tommy's leg was pulled out from under him, and suddenly he was staring up at Acheron with the end of the staff pressed against his chest.

"I win," Acheron said.

Fuck. Tommy could already tell he was going to have a bruise on his arm, and probably on his abdomen as well tomorrow morning. Still, he'd gotten far worse from his training with Dream, and smacked the staff off of his chest as he scrambled back to his feet.

"Again."

Acheron stared at him for a beat, but Tommy nodded to confirm what he said. Then, Acheron lunged forward, and this time Tommy was prepared.

Staff met staff and the force of Acheron's hit vibrated up through his arms. He grit his teeth to shove Acheron back, and then they were in a sword battle—just without the blades. Blow for blow they went, their staffs clashing and making Tommy's ears ring. There was the familiar rage heating up in his gut, flowing through his arms and adding more force to each of his swings. He embraced the flames, clenching his jaw as he thought back to his brother's faint laughter, to Acheron's taunts as he slid both his blades into Dream's chest.

Tommy swung his staff faster. He ducked under another hit, dodging from side to side as he started advancing towards Acheron. Acheron seemed surprised by the sudden improvement, before the corners of his lips quirked up in what could almost be considered a smile.

His lungs were heaving, his arms screaming with each new hit that Acheron blocked. But rage was just as potent as adrenaline, and Tommy bared his teeth as he pushed further and further, forcing Acheron off the mat and against the wall of the training room.

Their positions were reversed now from that first fight. Acheron was blocking, while Tommy was the one pressing down with his staff. His arms were trembling and he could feel sweat dripping down his back, but at the same time, it felt *so good* to meet Acheron's near-crimson eyes, snarling like an animal as he pushed with all the strength he had.

Acheron's foot slammed into his chest, and Tommy gasped when his head collided with the hardwood. He saw Acheron stepping forward to slam his staff into his chest again, and he twisted to the side, the staff missing him only by inches.

Tommy jumped to his feet, bending backwards to barely avoid another hit. Switching to holding the staff in one hand, Tommy watched Acheron's staff, and felt a flash of pain in his palm when he caught the end of Acheron's weapon.

He wrapped his fingers around the staff, not letting it go. Then, before Acheron could react, Tommy used his free hand to swing his own staff at Acheron's face, wrenching Acheron's staff down at the same time so the man wouldn't see it coming.

Wood smacked against flesh, and Acheron grunted as he stumbled to the side, holding onto his face with his free hand. Tommy grinned, taking another step forward, before Acheron's staff was suddenly yanked from his hand.

Tommy waited for the blow. Waited for the wood staff to smack into the side of his head, and for him to be sent into the ground. That's what Dream would've done. Tommy knew he'd played a dirty move, and Dream wouldn't let him get away with it.

But to his surprise, Acheron just groaned as he straightened up, before dropping his staff onto the ground. "Okay, we're not doing that again," he said, still cradling his cheekbone with his hand. "You could've taken my eye out."

"What are you doing? Neither of us won yet," Tommy asked, frowning at him. He was heaving, his chest struggling to rise and fall as deep as he needed, and his arms felt like they were made of jelly. Still, his muscles were pleasantly warm, and Tommy hadn't realized how much he missed training with Dream until this moment.

Acheron huffed. "I could've done the same thing to you and slammed you into the ground, but you literally have a head injury, and accordin' to Phil you're supposed to be on cognitive rest. I don't think me smacking you in the head with a piece of wood is really conducive to healing your brain."

Scoffing, Tommy rolled his eyes. "So you were going easy on me."

"I wasn't going easy on you. You were actually doing really good. I just decided to cut my losses before I gave you even more amnesia," Acheron said, finally dropping his hand from his face.

There was already a welt forming on his cheekbone where Tommy had hit him. It looked like it was going to be a nasty bruise tomorrow, and Tommy couldn't wait to see how bad it swelled.

"None of you were that worried about my head when Orpheus smacked me in the head with that pipe," Tommy reminded him.

"Well we didn't *know* you had brain damage then, dude!" Acheron exclaimed. "Plus we didn't even know it was you at the time. Wilbur was beating himself up so badly for that."

Tommy scoffed again, but his demeanor faltered hearing Orpheus' name again. Orpheus still hadn't come by to talk to him since he'd smashed the picture frame against the wall—the glass still littered that corner of the room, and although Tommy knew he should clean it up, every time he saw that picture something unpleasant lodged itself in his throat. He refused to think about why, and instead just chose to ignore the picture entirely.

It had been so long, Tommy was starting to wonder if Orpheus was off on a trip or something. It didn't make any sense for Orpheus to just stop coming by if he was still trying to convince Tommy they were a 'family' at some point or whatever the hell. Had he given up on the scheme when he saw Tommy wasn't going to believe it, while Acheron and Thanatos continued the charade out of stubbornness?

He had Acheron right in front of him. It wouldn't hurt to ask, right?

"Speaking of Orpheus," Tommy began, and Acheron seemed surprised by the subject change, "I haven't seen him in a while. Has he given up on your whole charade bit?" He tried to make his tone as flat as possible, showing no hint of emotion as he asked the tenuous question. But his voice ended up cracking at the last word, and he winced at the ache in his chest.

There was no reason for there to be an ache in his chest as he asked about Orpheus. It had to just be lingering soreness from the sparring.

Acheron raised an eyebrow, as if he was surprised by Tommy's question. "Do you want the truth, Tommy?"

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "That's all I've wanted this whole fucking time, but I don't think you're going to give it to me."

"I can't force you to believe this, but the truth is, it hurts him too much," Acheron explained, folding his arms over his chest. "I'm not gonna go and wax poetic about love or whatever because I know you won't believe it, but I will say you two were really close. So that, plus the fact that Wil has always been the most sensitive out of us means that this whole amnesia thing is hittin' him really hard." He paused. "It's hitting all of us really hard," he added in a softer voice.

He didn't care. The words meant nothing to Tommy because he *didn't* care about Orpheus. There was no guilt crawling up his throat, no cold vice that squeezed his heart when he heard that his words had cut the man so badly. That just- he didn't care. He couldn't.

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Tommy forced himself to look away from Acheron's gaze, and curled his fingers tighter around the wooden staff.

"So he's not coming back?" The words slipped out unbidden, and Tommy mentally cursed himself.

Now this seemed to surprise Acheron. "Do you want him to come talk to you?" He asked.

"No," Tommy snapped, biting down the 'yes' that sat on the tip of his tongue. "He's fucking annoying. I don't want to deal with more of his fake panic attacks and shit."

He could still hear his brother's- no, Orpheus' voice, the voice his traitorous mind had assigned to his brother's memory echoing in his ears. His laughter. His singing. It wasn't Orpheus, but there was a hook in his chest and it was tugging him straight towards the villain. All because his stupid subconscious was already falling into their trap.

Silence settled itself like a physical weight on Tommy's shoulders. The beats passed like the ticking of a bomb, and when Tommy finally glanced back up, he knew by Acheron's face that the man didn't believe him one bit.

"Can we go back to sparring?" Tommy asked quickly, pointing his staff at Acheron.

If he was fighting Acheron, he wouldn't be focusing on all these confusing emotions swirling through his head and his chest. He could focus on the tightness in his lungs, the pain in his muscles, and the sweat beading on his forehead. Nothing else.

"Tommy, do you remember Wilbur?" Acheron asked quietly, ignoring his request.

Clenching his jaw, Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as he shook his head. "No. I don't."

There was a pause. It lasted long enough that Tommy peeked open one eye again, and noticed that it looked like Acheron was struggling to keep his neutral composure.

"Do you remember me?" He asked, so low that Tommy almost didn't hear his words.

Tommy hated this. He hated Acheron right now, because while Thanatos and Orpheus were so good at crafting their voices to hold that potent sorrow, Acheron almost never had. But right now, there was an undeniable pain lingering in his words, and the shock of that was enough to wrap a vice around Tommy's lungs, making it hard to breathe.

"No," he forced out through his teeth. "I don't remember you, I don't remember Orpheus, and I don't remember Thanatos—now can we please fucking spar?"

The words ripped through him with a snarl, because if he didn't imbue as much anger as he could into his voice, he was worried he might start crying.

Acheron stared at him for a long moment, blinking slowly like Tommy was a puzzle he was trying to piece together in his mind. Then, after several agonizing seconds, he stepped back onto the edge of the mat and held his staff up in front of him.

“As long as you promise not to try and take out my eye again,” he said, the deadpan tone that didn’t betray any of his emotions having returned. “I kinda need it, and I really don’t feel like dyin’ right now to get it back.”

In the heavy atmosphere, the joke fell flat like a stone on the ground. But Tommy decided to take the offered way out, because he vastly preferred the Acheron who cracked deadpan jokes to the Acheron he’d seen only moments earlier.

“I can kill you if you need,” Tommy offered, covering up his shaky tone with a sickly sweet smile.

Acheron huffed, and the tension seemed to leak out of his shoulders just the tiniest amount. “I appreciate the offer, but I’ll have to say no.”

Tensing his muscles, Tommy forced out, “We’ll see about that.”

And then, he lunged.



Several days passed after his training session with Acheron. Orpheus still didn’t come back to Tommy’s room.

Tommy tried not to think about that too hard. He also tried not to think about the conversation he’d had with Acheron during their sparring, because it just made him want to curl up in a corner and never crawl out.

There were a lot of things he was trying not to think about these days.

It was easy to distract himself from his traitorous thoughts when he wasn’t just sitting alone in his room, which was why he was grateful for Tubbo and Ranboo visiting despite their minor argument the last time they’d been around.

“I just don’t know why it’s so unethical to experiment on people! If they consent to it, what’s the issue?”

Well, Tommy was mostly grateful. Tubbo still sometimes disturbed him.

“I mean, it depends on what kind of experiment you’re running,” Ranboo was saying, his long legs stretched out across the length of Tommy’s bed. Tommy was laying parallel next to him, while Tubbo had laid himself over both of their legs because he refused to sit on one of the chairs in the room.

“Elaborate on that,” Tubbo said, rolling to the side so his cheek was pressed against Tommy’s shin.

“Well, if it’s like a psychology experiment where you just wanna see if people will take donuts or not to test their self control, then yeah there’s no issue with that. But if you’re, like, experimenting with super dangerous chemicals I don’t think it’s a good idea,” Ranboo told him.

Tubbo frowned. “Even if they consent to it?”

“Usually yeah,” Ranboo nodded.

There was a pause as Tubbo mulled this over. Then, he was twisting over so his other cheek was now pressed against Tommy’s shin, and he was looking up at Tommy’s face. “Tommy, what do you think?”

“I mean, I kinda agree with Ranboo. If you’re using super dangerous shit that you know is probably gonna hurt people, I don’t think it’s a great idea to test it on them,” Tommy explained, with Ranboo nodding aggressively in agreement.

“But what if you give the participants a whole list detailing all the possible side effects and they *still* agree?” Tubbo pushed.

Tommy frowned. “Why the hell are you asking this? Are you planning on becoming a mad scientist or some shit?”

“Well, I don’t have any current plans but-”

“Tubbo, please,” Ranboo sighed, dragging his hands down his face.

“I think it’s a fair question! What is the moral dilemma of harming people if they consent to it?” Sitting up, Tubbo looked between Ranboo and Tommy. “Like, if I gave one of you permission to murder me, I don’t see the problem morally there.”

“I think that’s considered assisted suicide,” Ranboo said.

“So you wouldn’t murder me if I asked?” Tubbo challenged, raising an eyebrow at Ranboo.

“Wh- No! Of course not!” Ranboo seemed horrified by the suggestion, while Tommy could tell Tubbo was more just saying stuff at this point to get under Ranboo’s skin rather than support an actual discussion.

“What if I injected myself with some evil virus and I was gonna kill the entire world unless you killed me, and I told you to do it?” He questioned, raising his eyebrows.

“That is strangely specific,” Tommy pointed out, struggling to stifle his laughter at this point.

“I just like thinking these things out! Philosophy type stuff, y’know?” Tubbo exclaimed, waving his hands around. “Anyway, Tommy, if I injected myself with an evil virus would you-”

Groaning, Tommy dropped his head against the back of his headboard. “Yes Tubbo, I would kill you if you injected an evil virus into yourself and you told me to do it to save the world.”

“Now that’s what I’m talking about! This is why you were a hero. You can do the hard stuff to save the world.”

Even though Tubbo had meant it as a joke, Tommy flinched at his use of the past tense. *Were* a hero. Not *are*.

He wanted to correct him. To tell Tubbo that he was going to get out of here eventually, and he would go back to where he belonged as Lucid, right by Dream's side.

But he knew neither Tubbo or Ranboo would take that very well. So, he bit his tongue, and tried not to let it linger in his mind for too long.

Thankfully, his focus was quickly shifted when Tubbo hopped off the bed. "I'm hungry," he announced, his thick hair sticking up in three different places. "Who wants ice cream?"

"That sounds really good," Ranboo agreed, clambering off the bed.

Huffing, Tommy fell back against his pillows. "If you have an unopened carton in there, bring it up to me. Otherwise don't bother."

Tubbo stopped halfway to the door. "Oh shit, we forgot to tell you."

Frowning, Tommy sat back up. "Forgot to tell me what?"

"You can come downstairs with us! Today Phil said as long as you're with us, you can come out of your room and walk around the house," Tubbo told him, one hand in his pocket, and the other on the doorknob.

...what?

He could leave the room? Tommy had figured that was just a one time thing with Acheron, because Acheron knew he wouldn't try to run with him as the guard. But Thanatos was going to let him go out as long as he was just with Tubbo and Ranboo?

Holy shit. This was it. This was his chance. He might not be able to get away from Acheron, but he could definitely slip away from Tubbo and Ranboo.

Grinning widely, Tommy jumped off the bed and rushed to the door. "Hell yeah! I'm going fucking stir crazy in there, man. You don't even know."

Tommy had to be smart about this. He couldn't tip Tubbo and Ranboo off to his plan. If he could wait until they were both distracted, he could make a run for it. He'd have to be careful that Ranboo didn't use his void travel to catch up to him, but if he got far enough away before Ranboo could, he'd be forced to hop out of the void before he caught up to Tommy because of his distance limit.

Thankfully, neither Tubbo or Ranboo seemed suspicious of his motives.

"Yeah, I can only imagine," Ranboo nodded in sympathy.

"Well, let's head out then," Tubbo said, grinning as he took the key out of his pocket and unlocked the door.

Tommy's heart was pounding in his ears as they traveled down the hallway and to the stairs. Once again, his eyes were drawn to that one door across from the staircase, but he didn't let himself linger on it as long as he had before. Whatever that room was, it didn't matter. He was getting out of here today, and wasn't going to have to worry about anything like that again.

They hurried down the stairs, and Tommy glanced towards the living room as they passed it, trying to see if there was anyone there. He only saw the empty couches, and let out a silent sigh of relief. Hopefully it would just be him, Tubbo, and Ranboo in this part of the house, because he would be fucked if Acheron or Thanatos showed up.

At the bottom of the stairs, they headed to the left, where the empty dining room Tommy had noticed before was. They brushed past the dusty dining table, and Tommy ran his fingers over the wood as they passed, watching the way his skin carved clean trails in the thin grey film.

Connected to the dining room was a round archway, which opened up into a *very* nice kitchen. Granite countertops glimmered in the afternoon sunlight pouring through the window over the sink, and all the appliances were stainless steel and looked close to brand new.

As his eyes skimmed over the kitchen layout, that was when he saw it.

There was an island counter that looked like it separated the kitchen and a long hallway. But right next to the counter, there was a sliding glass door.

The sliding glass door looked out into the neatly trimmed backyard Tommy could see from his window. The backyard that had a fence lining the perimeter, but not a fence that was too tall for Tommy to climb.

That was it. There it was. His escape route.

He didn't let himself look at it for too long. As soon as he located where he was going to run to, he forced himself to turn back to Tubbo and Ranboo, following Tubbo as he beelined straight for the fridge.

Tommy and Ranboo both leaned against the counters right next to the fridge. Neither one of the boys seemed suspicious of Tommy, with Tubbo opening the freezer drawer and burying himself headfirst to search for the aforementioned ice cream.

"Okay boys! We got, uh, plain vanilla, then we got mint chocolate chip--"

"I want mint chocolate chip!" Ranboo quipped.

Tubbo made a disgusted noise. "Of course you do. I'm trying to see if there's a carton in here that hasn't been opened so you can eat it, Tommy. I think--"

Tommy wasn't paying attention to Tubbo's rambling about ice cream flavors at all. Instead, his ears were ringing as he debated inching his way to the backdoor.

"D'you like Ben and Jerry's, Tommy?" Tubbo asked, lifting his head up for a moment.

Freezing in place, Tommy nodded. "Uh, yeah. That's good."

"Cool. Ranboo, can you grab the bowls?"

"Sure thing."

Turning to the cabinets, Ranboo started digging through them for bowls, while Tubbo was still taking out the ice cream cartons from the freezer. Neither one of them were facing him.

Now.

Spinning around, Tommy sprinted for the island counter.

"TOMMY!"

He heard a bowl shatter behind him as Ranboo yelped, but Tommy didn't glance behind him. Instead, he launched himself on top of the counter, sliding over the granite and landing hard against the hardwood. Then, he lunged forward to grab the handle for the backdoor.

His hand didn't wrap around the handle though. Instead, his fingers slammed into something hard, cold, and completely invisible. As if there was a pane of glass blocking him from actually being able to grab the door.

"What the-" Tommy pressed his hand against the barrier, his breathing quickening as he began to slam his fists against the 'glass'. It was then he was able to see the subtle ripple in the air, and his head whipped back towards the kitchen.

Tubbo had his face scrunched up in pain, and was holding his hands out in front of him. It was then Tommy realized that force fields couldn't just keep things away from you. They could also trap you inside of places.

"Tubbo-"

Before Tommy could say anything else, there was a tearing sound behind him. Then, strong arms were wrapping around his, and Tommy screeched as Ranboo yanked him away from the door and into his chest.

"Let go of me!" Tommy shouted, clawing at Ranboo's arms.

Off to the side, Tubbo dropped his arms and sprinted over to them. Tommy was thrashing around like a wild animal at this point, trying to do anything to get Ranboo to let go of him. Ranboo wasn't nearly as strong as he was, so his grip on Tommy's shoulders faltered, and Tommy prepared to dash for the door again.

But then Tubbo was skidding in front of him, pressing himself right up against Tommy's chest, and Tommy could only watch in horror as the force field reappeared, completely encircling them in a bubble.

Ranboo let go of him, and Tommy dropped to his knees. He pressed his hand against the force field with Tubbo right next to him, staring through the ripples at the backdoor that was

so close, yet so far at the same time.

With another snarl, Tommy slammed his fist against the force field as hard as he could. Pain erupted in his hand and he cried out, cradling his hand to his chest as he shot a betrayed look at Tubbo.

"*Why?*" Tommy whispered, his voice cracking. "Don't- Don't you understand? Why I want to leave?"

At this point, Ranboo had run off, presumably to go get one of the Syndicate members. This left only Tommy and Tubbo in the force field bubble, and Tubbo crouched down next to him on the ground.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," Tubbo said softly, and it was then Tommy noticed the wetness on his cheeks. "We can't lose you again."

"But you should know how I feel!" Tommy exclaimed, his voice cracking even more.

His once chance at freedom. It was so close, yet so far. And the person standing in his way was one of the only people he'd trusted since he woke up here.

"Tubbo, *please*," Tommy choked out. "Please, let me go. I need to get out of here. You don't-"

"He's in here!" Ranboo suddenly called out.

Looking behind him, Tommy's face crumpled when he saw Acheron and Ranboo both running into the room. Acheron's gaze flickered between Tubbo and Tommy, and Tommy waited for him to frown. For anger to twist his face into a scowl as he realized that Tommy tried to escape.

He should've known at this point that wasn't going to happen though. Instead, Acheron just sighed, and the force field dissipated as the man walked over to them both. Next to him, Tubbo slumped to the ground, obviously exhausted by stretching his powers out so much more than he was supposed to.

Tommy looked at the door again, the longing clawing at his throat and scoring bloody gouges in his chest. But Acheron was here now, and if Tommy so much as tried to stand up, he'd throw Tommy over his shoulders like he weighed nothing.

His chance was gone. He'd been mere inches away from freedom, and it was pulled right out from under him by his own best friend.

Acheron didn't say anything. He just stretched out a hand, offering to help Tommy to his feet.

Setting his jaw, Tommy mustered up the angriest glare he could at the man, although it was difficult with tears swimming in his vision. He pushed to his feet on his own, sparing a glance at the ground where Tubbo had now rolled onto his back, and was fighting to catch his breath as if he'd just run a marathon.

Ranboo was staring at him like he was struggling not to cry himself. Tommy noticed a bit of blood dripping from his arm where Tommy had scratched him, and winced at the damage he'd done in his desperation.

No one said anything. Acheron just placed a hand on his shoulder, and Tommy let the villain guide him back to his room.

Tubbo and Ranboo didn't follow him back up.



"Wasting your time. Wasting mine. I hate to see you leaving. A fate worse than dying."

Tommy woke up with a start, bolting upright in his bed with his brother's song still echoing through his ears.

Fuck. That was his brother's song. Not a song on the radio. A song his brother wrote himself. Tommy knew that, he recognized it, and if he wanted he could probably sing the entire fucking thing because he used to make him play it so often because it helped him sleep-

Tommy's cut off his thoughts with a hitched breath. Tears were staining his cheeks again, and frustration flashed through him when he realized this was the second time he was crying today.

After Acheron had taken him back to his room, Tommy had sobbed into his pillows for a good thirty minutes about how close he'd been. Then he screamed a bit, threw some stuff at the walls in his anger, before he started pounding his fists on the door and begging to be let out.

No one had come to let him out. Ranboo and Tubbo didn't come back to talk to him. Acheron didn't stop by to take him sparring again.

After he had exhausted himself with his crying, Tommy had passed out on his bed before the sun had even set. Now it was well into the night, with moonlight reflecting off the broken glass on the floor, making it glitter like diamonds.

Tommy felt heavy. His limbs were weighed down by his fatigue, his cheeks were sticky with dried tears and now quickly being moistened by new ones. His eyes were swollen, and Tommy could still hear the damn song playing over and over again in his head.

A sob bubbled up from his chest. He was so tired. Not just in the physical sense, but in the *everything* sense. He was so tired of having to be on guard all the time, trying to watch every little interaction with the Syndicate to make sure they weren't tricking him, needing to watch his words with Ranboo and Tubbo when every instinct he had was telling him to trust them—he was just exhausted. From all of it.

And there was still this ache in his chest whenever he thought about his brother, and it was so painfully similar to the ache he got when someone brought Orpheus up. He hated that it was

similar because Orpheus couldn't be his brother, he would never be brothers with a murderer like him but- but-

Fuck. Tommy missed living with Dream. He missed when things made sense. He was Dream's sidekick, and they fought the bad guys, and the bad guys were out to kidnap Tommy so they couldn't let that happen. It was so much easier then. But now Tommy was here and he had all these conflicting emotions and fragments of memories swirling through his head, and he was fucking terrified of all of it.

Maybe it was just the fact that Tommy was still emotionally raw from his failed escape attempt earlier. Maybe this breakdown was a long time coming. Either way, Tommy let out an even louder sob, and soon he couldn't stop the sobs from clawing up his throat.

Grabbing a pillow, Tommy wrapped his arms around it and clutched it to his chest, burying his face in the top and screaming as loud as he dared. Nothing made sense and he was so tired all the time—all he wanted was to go home.

But where was home? Living with Dream? Dream had been a great mentor to him and he was so grateful to the man for saving him, but Dream's apartment had never felt like home to him.

Was it here? It... It felt closer. But there was so much conflict, and the idea of being home with the Syndicate made him want to throw up. This couldn't be his home.

Home was with his brother. Fuck. He wanted his brother so badly right now.

Letting out another scream sob into his pillow, Tommy gasped for air, his eyes burning with tears as they stained his pillowcase.

Then, there was a knock at the door.

His cries cut off halfway, and Tommy lifted his head from the pillow, heart pounding in his ears as he noticed the shadow standing in the light under the doorway.

"Hello?" Tommy called out, wincing at how hoarse his voice was.

"Tommy? Are you okay?"

Tommy's breath caught in his throat at the voice on the other side.

It was Orpheus. Orpheus, who Tommy hadn't seen in ages. Orpheus, who Acheron told him wasn't talking to him because of how much it hurt him. Orpheus, who Tommy's traitorous brain had assigned as the voice of his brother.

The ache in his chest grew tenfold. On any other night, Tommy would've told him to fuck off.

But tonight wasn't any other night.

Was he okay?

“No,” Tommy answered, another sob bubbling up inside of him. “No, I-I don’t think I am.”

There was a pause. Tommy wondered if Orpheus left.

Then,

“Can I come in?”

If Tommy was more awake, he would’ve said no. That’s what he should’ve done. He was in an emotionally raw state, and Orpheus could take advantage of that. The last thing he wanted was for Orpheus to come see him like that.

But Tommy found his mouth moving of its own accord as he responded with a soft, “yeah.”

Orpheus didn’t open the door. Instead, Tommy watched as a translucent head popped through the wood, before Orpheus fully stepped through in his intangible state. As soon as he was fully in the room he solidified again, and something in Tommy’s chest lurched at seeing Orpheus’ face for the first time in what felt like far too long.

He looked tired. That was Tommy’s first thought on seeing him. There were dark bags under his eyes, and his cheeks were thinned out, like he hadn’t been eating much. He was also wearing that same yellow sweater he’d worn the last time Tommy had seen him.

Another sob hiccuped in his chest. Orpheus’ worried expression softened.

“Oh Tommy,” he whispered, looking like he was just barely restraining himself from walking over to the bed.

And- fuck, just hearing the voice of his brother say his name so softly like that, so sadly—Tommy hiccuped again, and buried his face in his pillow as a fresh wave of tears rose up in him.

Orpheus let out a wounded noise. “Can I come sit next to you?”

Again, Tommy should’ve said no. But this was his brother’s voice. Even if he couldn’t let himself think that Orpheus was his brother, he... he could let himself pretend, right? Just for tonight?

Tommy nodded into his pillow. He heard footsteps, and then the mattress dipped as Wilbur sat on the edge right next to him. Looking up from the pillow again, Tommy saw Wilbur had left space between them.

At that moment, all he could think of was how tired he was of everything. How tired he was, and how badly he wanted to go home. To *have* a home.

Which was why Tommy closed the gap between them, and practically threw himself into Wilbur’s arms, burying his face in his shoulder and letting all of the built up frustration out in one fell swoop.

Wilbur stiffened at first, clearly unsure of what Tommy was doing. But as soon as he realized Tommy was hugging him, he relaxed, and warm arms wrapped around Tommy's back, pulling him close.

"It's okay," Wilbur whispered into Tommy's hair as he cried, "I got you. It's okay."

More tears stained Wilbur's sweater, but Tommy was barely thinking at this point. He was just so exhausted, and the arms hugging him were so painfully familiar. He didn't want to think about villains or morality or his blocked memories right now. All he wanted was a hug, and to pretend like he was home, just for a moment.

"Just let it out," Wilbur continued, running his hand up and down Tommy's back. "Let it all out. It's okay."

And Tommy did. He cried and cried and cried—he couldn't remember the last time he cried this much. He couldn't remember so many things. He couldn't remember the last time he'd heard someone whisper reassurances into his hair like this, or the last time he'd even been hugged like this.

The tears emptied everything out inside of him. His confusion, his rage, his frustration—by the time his eyes ran dry, he felt like someone had taken an ice cream scooper to his chest. He was hollow, and completely exhausted.

Slowly, Tommy started to come back to himself. He pulled back from Wilbur, and he let him go without any hesitation. Tommy shifted so he was sitting next to Wilbur again, but this time they were shoulder to shoulder, and Tommy timed his breaths to match Wilbur's own.

"You haven't- I haven't seen you in a while," Tommy said, wincing at how rough his words were.

Wilbur took a shaky breath. "Yeah, it was just... it was really hard for me. To talk to you. I figured it would be better, since you didn't want to see me either."

Tommy winced, although he didn't know why. He shouldn't- Hell, he shouldn't even be sitting here having this conversation right now. Of course he didn't want to see Wil- Orpheus. And yet here he was, hugging him and crying on him because he was such a mess, he couldn't handle his own breakdown himself.

"I still don't remember you," Tommy said suddenly, needing to say *something* to try and sever the thread that now hung between them. To try and remind himself that he still hated Orpheus.

Orpheus flinched. "But I- I thought-"

"This doesn't mean anything," Tommy choked out, the words threatening to lodge themselves in his throat.

Tommy didn't dare look up to see the expression on Orpheus' face. He kept his eyes on his lap, twisting his hands together until he cut off the blood circulation to one of his fingers.

“Do you want me to leave?” Orpheus asked softly.

Jerkily, Tommy nodded. There was a hitched breath from Orpheus, and then he was standing, his light footsteps padding towards the door.

Tommy didn’t want to look up. He couldn’t look up. If he looked up, he might just start bawling again, and then he’d be back at square one.

The footsteps paused right before the door.

“Do you want me to start coming by again? During the day?”

Head snapping up, Tommy saw that Orpheus was hunched over, like he was trying to curl in on himself. His face told Tommy he was terrified, and more than a little sad, but he was also... hopeful?

Tommy should say no. Should squash that hope right then and there. That’s what he was supposed to do. Not let them believe they could trick him like that.

His heart lurched again, and Tommy remembered the feeling of Wilbur’s warm arms wrapped around him. How achingly familiar it was.

“Yes,” Tommy admitted, dropping his head again. “Don’t disappear again.”

Even though Tommy wasn’t looking up, he could practically feel Orpheus’ smile from across the room.

“Okay Tommy,” Orpheus told him, “I’ll see you tomorrow then.”

When Tommy lifted his eyes, Orpheus was gone, and his chest was hollow.

At the very least, it wasn’t hard for him to fall back asleep.

Chapter End Notes

we are finally getting the tiniest bit of the comfort part of hurt/comfort. it'll get a bit better soon, but yeah ngl writing this chapter made me very emotional especially that last bit

I really hope you guys enjoyed! I had so much fun writing this chapter, there's so much here from finally getting a solid bedrock bros conversation, and then the bench trio troubles, and FINALLY TOMMY GETS A DAMN HUG he's needed one for so long now

I have a discord server! if you wanna come cry about the latest chapter join us
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

there's a playlist for this fic! go check it out [here](#)

anyway please let me know what you thought down in the comments below! I don't respond to most of them but I read them all and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

flickers

Chapter Summary

Tommy has to deal with the aftermath of his weak moment.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone i am so tired rn bc i havent had coffee yet and I need to go get a blood test soon so i'm rushing these notes a bit

but anyway hi beloveds this chapter is very long at 11k words, honestly I debated splitting it up but there really wasn't a great place for it, so you just get a huge ass chapter instead!

as always thank you all so much for the love on the last chapter, there's another scene at the end of this chapter that I've had in my head since before I wrote this fic so I'm very excited for you all to see it

TWs: non-POV character dissociating at the end of the chapter, healthy grounding methods are used

hope you guys enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next day, Orpheus came back just like he said he would.

When Tommy had woken up that morning and remembered what he did the night before, he had the urge to bash his head into the nearest wall. If he hadn't been half-asleep and sad as hell, he wouldn't have done something that stupid. It told the Syndicate that their plan was working, they were getting through to him.

Orpheus had knocked on his door that morning with a tray for his breakfast in his hands, and Tommy debated telling him to fuck off again. It would've been a shoddy attempt to fix the damage that had already been done, but at least it would've been *something*.

To his frustration though, when he met Orpheus' eyes in the light of day, Tommy could only think of the warm arms wrapped around him the night before. The soft whispers into his hair that he was okay. The relief that had filled every pore of his being at finally being able to let it out, just for a moment.

He couldn't tell Orpheus to fuck off. The lump in his throat wouldn't let him.

"We're not going to talk about last night," Tommy said instead as soon as Orpheus sat down in the plush chair next to the bed.

"That's fine," Orpheus agreed, pulling a granola bar out of his sweatpants pocket. While he still seemed tired, there was a lightness to his shoulders that hadn't been there the night before. Like something that had been weighing on him was finally taken away. "Are you feeling better though?"

Was he feeling better? His eyes were sticky from his dried tears. His chest still felt hollow, and sitting in the same room as Orpheus was hard, because now he had finally gotten some semblance of the brother he'd been missing for so long, even if it wasn't real.

That traitorous voice in the back of his mind that was falling for the Syndicate's tricks wanted to ask Orpheus to sit on the bed with him, so he could sit shoulder to shoulder with him, and relish in the warmth of the lie one more time.

But Tommy was more awake now. He wasn't a slave to that ache in his chest right now, so he shoved the feeling down. The hollowness grew stronger, but Tommy ignored it.

"I heard you and Techno sparred the other day," Orpheus said when Tommy made no attempts to fill the silence between them.

"We did," Tommy nodded. "I landed a pretty good hit on him."

"That bruise on his cheek was nasty," Orpheus grinned. "It was impressive you landed that. Techno's one of the best fighters I know."

Huffing, Tommy tried not to smile at the compliment as he tore open his own granola bar. "I mean, I'm one of the biggest men ever so, not really surprising now, is it?" The joke was a weak attempt at deflecting the compliment, because he didn't want Orpheus to think he valued his praise or anything.

Orpheus paused mid bite at this, blinking at Tommy a few times. Tommy narrowed his eyes at him, waiting for him to say what he was thinking, but he stayed quiet as he glanced back down to his granola bar.

"What was that about?" Tommy asked.

"Sorry," Orpheus muttered, shrinking back into the chair. "I just- I haven't heard you make a big man joke in a while. It surprised me."

Oh.

Well, Tommy wasn't surprised to hear that about his past self. He'd been calling himself a Big Man for years. Of course he had said that around the Syndicate before, if he'd really stayed there for as long as he did.

Kidnapped. Not staying there like he was there willingly. Shit. They really were getting in his head, weren't they?

Silence fell over the two of them again. Tommy chewed on his granola bar, the chocolate melting on his tongue, and when he finished it he reached for the plastic-wrapped string cheese that was also on the tray.

Orpheus seemed at a loss for words, or at least wasn't sure how to talk to him. Again, Tommy should've told him to leave, but he couldn't seem to muster up the strength to actually spit it out.

"Why did you become a villain?" Tommy asked after several minutes of silence had passed.

Orpheus looked up, his eyes going wide at the question. "What?"

"Why did you become a villain?" Tommy repeated, frowning at him. "If I'm stuck here with you assholes, figure I might as well find out why you do the shit you do."

The truth was, the question was just the first thing that came to Tommy's head. He hadn't ever really bothered to think about *why* the Syndicate did what they did all that much. They did terrible things, things that there was no justification for.

But he was curious to hear their reasoning. That was all.

"Well, Phil and Techno—"

"I didn't ask about them," Tommy said, cutting him off. "I asked about you."

He didn't want to hear the excuses Orpheus came up with for Acheron and Thanatos. Right now, he only wanted to know about Orpheus, since he had always been the villain that confused Tommy the most.

Orpheus paused, wringing his hands in his lap. "They're my family," he admitted after a few moments. "I don't always agree with what they do, but it's not like I'm going to go against them. Plus, this city is kind of fucked, so it's not like I fully disagree with them either."

Tommy scoffed. "You hurt innocent people because you can't say no to your family?"

Flinching, Orpheus looked away from Tommy. "I don't- I—" he paused again, taking a breath to steady himself. "I'm... not a good person, Tommy. None of us are, and I recognize that. We call ourselves villains for a reason. And villains do bad things like hurting innocent people. It's just the way these things work."

"So what? You're saying that because you're called a villain, you have to do bad things? Even if you don't agree with them?" Tommy pushed, narrowing his eyes.

"We all have our roles to play," Orpheus said softly, keeping his eyes on the wall. "I'm not the type of person who can be the good guy. So my only other option is to play the villain, right alongside my brother and my father." Another beat. "Plus, I want to protect them. I can't just let them go out and do this stuff on their own."

"You're talking like you don't want to do this villain shit at all," Tommy said, eyeing Orpheus carefully.

Finally looking back at his face, Orpheus met his eyes, staying silent as they stared each other down. Tommy wasn't sure what emotion he was feeling right now, but there was something dark and sad twisting around in his gut.

He didn't like it.

"I don't think I believe you," Tommy said after nearly a full minute of silence.

"I wouldn't believe me either, so that's okay," Orpheus reassured him, not looking hurt by the statement.

Tommy gulped and dropped his gaze back down to his lap. The wriggling darkness in his stomach was whispering to him, calling him a liar. A part of him wanted to believe Orpheus. A part of him *did* believe him. And that was terrifying, because Tommy knew this had to be another one of their tricks. Trying to get him to sympathize with them. Make him think that Orpheus wasn't all that bad.

But what if it's not a trick? The traitorous voice in the back of his mind whispered. *What if he's not lying? What if none of them are?*

Gritting his teeth, Tommy shook his head to clear the thought. This all led back to the night before, when all he'd wanted was for things to make sense again. Nothing made sense right now, and it was terrifying. Terrifying, painful, and unbelievably frustrating.

The Syndicate were monsters. He just had to keep telling himself that. Even when Orpheus hugged him when he cried, or Acheron didn't get mad at him for trying to escape, or Thanatos spoke in that kind voice that soothed the anxieties swirling in the back of his mind. They were still monsters.

"I'm done with my food," Tommy snapped, holding his trash out in his clenched fist.

Orpheus blinked, pushing to his feet. "Do you want me to go?"

Tommy nodded. "Yeah. I, um, gotta take a shower."

Holding out his hand, Tommy dropped the trash into Orpheus' palm. Orpheus curled his fingers around the plastic, and then his free hand was reaching for Tommy.

Tommy flinched back on instinct. Orpheus' hand froze in the air between them, and Tommy shook his head.

"Just because I let you hug me once doesn't mean you can just grab me whenever you want," Tommy spat, although there was no real venom behind the words.

Hurt flashed over Orpheus' face, but he nodded anyway, and slowly retracted his hand. "Sorry, I'll remember that."

Tommy watched Orpheus step back, moving towards the door with obvious reluctance. He squashed down the urge to reach out, to let Orpheus squeeze his shoulder or ruffle his hair like it seemed he was going to do. No, he shouldn't want that. He *didn't*.

"I'll see you later, Tommy," Orpheus said as he opened up the door, plastic trash poking out between his fingers.

The only response Tommy gave him was a quick nod, and just like that, the door was clicking shut behind Orpheus with the lock sliding back into place.

Once again, Tommy was alone.



To Tommy's surprise, it was only a day before he was let out of his room again, despite his failed escape attempt.

Thanatos had showed up with his food, offering to let Tommy come do some chores with him. While Tommy didn't exactly want to do chores, he was already itching to get out of his cell again, and didn't want to waste the fact that they clearly weren't punishing him for trying to run.

Well, maybe they were. Maybe the chores were the punishment.

But as soon as Tommy found out what 'chores' Thanatos meant, he knew this couldn't be a punishment, because how dare he even describe something as cool as this as a chore?

There was a greenhouse connected to the first floor of the house. It was like a glorified sunroom more than a real greenhouse, with a low ceiling, walls made of frosted glass that let plenty of natural sunlight in, and warm air that clung to Tommy's skin.

The plants themselves were the best part though. A large, square planter took up most of the space, with delicate green shoots poking out of rich, dark earth. There was also a smaller pot shoved into the corner. It held a tomato vine that wrapped itself around a large stick shoved into the pot, with bulbous fruits sitting between shades of vibrant red and dark green hanging off the sides.

"I need help with the garden today," Thanatos told him, giving him a warm smile at Tommy's obvious awe. "Need to move some plants from the smaller pots to the main planter. Does that sound alright with you?"

With his hand outstretched to brush against some soft green leaves poking out of the planter, Tommy paused, before quickly retracting his hand. "I, uh, don't know how to. I wouldn't want to kill the plants."

Tommy had always wanted to learn to garden. When he was ten, his foster mother had a beautiful garden in their backyard. Rows of vibrant flowers and leafy greens littered the dirt, and Tommy had once asked her if he could help with it. She scoffed and refused him, saying he'd kill all her precious plants.

She was probably right. His hands weren't made for being delicate. For carefully brushing his fingers against a living thing so fragile, he could snap it in two with a single twist. His hands were rough, made for curling into fists and causing bruises. His knuckles were still dusted with scabs from spending hours on end punching a boxing dummy back at the Hero Tower. They weren't gentle. Not like these plants needed.

Thanatos, however, didn't seem too concerned. "You'll pick it back up quickly. It's like muscle memory."

Tommy blinked. "Are you saying I've helped you garden before?"

Thanatos nodded, crouching down to grab a tray of tiny pots that all had bright green sprouts stretching high towards the sky. "It was your favorite thing. Said you always wanted to learn to garden, but you'd never gotten the opportunity till us."

That sounded true at least. If Tommy had gotten the opportunity to learn how to garden when he was last in their captivity, he knew he would never have refused that.

Slowly, Tommy nodded, and Thanatos gestured for Tommy to join him. His wings brushed against the floor, and Tommy just barely avoided stepping on one of the longer feathers as he crouched down next to the man.

"First you wanna dig a hole for the plant to go into here in the planter," Thanatos began, picking up a small shovel and creating a divot in the dirt. "Once you have that done, you wanna loosen the dirt in the smaller pot. Grab the base of the plant stem and use it to pull the whole clump of dirt out." With that, he grabbed the thicker base of the plant in his hand, tugging lightly until a clump of dirt was freed from the small pot. Twisting roots spilled off the sides of the dirt, and Thanatos held it up for Tommy to see better, before he placed it in the divot in the planter. "Then, just use your hands to pat it all down."

That seemed simple enough.

Picking up one of the tiny pots, Tommy dug his fingers into the dirt, the warm earth bunching up under his nails as he did his best to loosen the soil. Then, with as gentle of a grip as he could manage, he grabbed the base of the plant and pulled up.

The dirt didn't move.

"Aw mate, you gotta pull harder than that," Thanatos pointed out.

Tommy frowned. "I don't want to kill it."

"You won't. Trust me, they might seem delicate, but these little guys are tougher than they look," Thanatos reassured him.

This time, Tommy tugged harder on the plant. He winced when he felt the dirt shift underneath of it, but tried to believe in Thanatos' words and kept going. The dirt crumpled, and soon he was holding a clump of roots and soil with the leafy top still attached.

"Perfect. Now you just gotta put it in the planter, here," Thanatos instructed, pointing to a small divot he'd dug out.

With the same care Tommy imagined he would hold a bomb with, he placed the plant gently in the small divot of dirt. Then, mimicking Thanatos as best he could, Tommy brushed the planter dirt over the sides and patted it all down.

"And just like that you've successfully replanted it," Thanatos told him, practically beaming at him. "Told you you'd be great at it."

And for some reason, pride swelled up in Tommy's chest the longer he stared at Thanatos' smile. He'd done it. He hadn't killed the plant. It was there, alive, and it was going to get the chance to grow bigger in the planter than it ever could in that tiny pot. Tommy found himself preening at Thanatos' praise.

Until the reality of where he was and who he was with came crashing down on him like a bucket of cold water. The smile Tommy had been giving Thanatos dropped from his face, and his shoulders stiffened as he scooched away from the man so there was more distance between them.

Thanatos' own smile dropped as well, and although he didn't say anything, Tommy could read the disappointment lining his face.

Tommy didn't care. He didn't want Thanatos' praise. He didn't care if Thanatos was proud of him, or complimented his gardening skills, or was nice to him in any way, shape, or form. Why the fuck did he smile at Thanatos like that? What the hell was wrong with him?

Neither of them said anything as they both resumed the planting. Tommy picked up the next pot, his fingers shaking as he loosened the dirt and carefully pried the plant up from the stem. Thanatos had already dug out another hole for him, so he repeated the same thing he did before, digging his fingers into the soft soil as he made sure the plant was secure.

This routine went on for several minutes. It was a simple task. Loosen dirt, tug on the plant, pat the soil down. It was strangely calming, and despite his alarm earlier, Tommy found the tension leaking out of his shoulders once again.

They kept shifting down the side of the planter to make sure the plants were evenly spaced apart. Soon they reached the end of the planter, and Tommy paused when he saw a small square of empty soil that didn't have any other plants sitting near it.

That... That was wrong. There was supposed to be something planted there, right? Carrots had been planted in that section of the planter before. Ones that he had planted himself, back when Phil had first taught him how to-

Oh.

Oh.

Like the memory with Tubbo and Ranboo, this memory of him gardening with Phil didn't resurface gradually, but just appeared in his mind as if it had always been there.

When Phil had first taught him how to garden, he'd offered to let Tommy have his own plants to take care of. Tommy had chosen carrots, because they already had tomatoes and he wanted something he could eat, but potatoes had always been Techno's thing and he didn't want to be forced to endure Techno's hour long rants about the best potato-farming methods known to man-

Bile rose in Tommy's throat as he lurched away from the planter. His heart was pounding in his ears as he shook his head, because that memory was fucking *wrong*. Again, there was that strange dissonance with the emotions he could remember feeling in the memory. He'd been happy. Happy to finally get the chance to garden, grateful to Phil for letting him plant his own stuff, warm when Phil had told him he was a natural and that he was sure his carrots were going to sprout in no time.

That- That was wrong. That couldn't be-

"You've taken to this better than Techno even did, and he once won a potato farming competition, y'know?"

The soil was warm between Tommy's fingers. Damp air clung to him like a second skin, making every breath something thick. Strangely enough, Tommy didn't mind it.

"How the fuck do you compete at potato farming?"

"Beats me. He had this whole rivalry going too. I swear to god he stayed up for a fuckin' week straight researching the best way to maximize your potato crop."

"Well Dadza, if he's the master of potato farming, I wanna be the god of carrot farming!"

Phil's laughter was warm, and Tommy watched as his feathers shook with the motion.

"I'm sure you'll get there, mate. I have faith in you."

Tommy's blood roared in his ears as his chest rose and fell in rapid gasps. From the corner of his eye, he could see Phil- no, Thanatos- he could see Thanatos giving him a worried look, and shit Tommy couldn't let him know what he'd just remembered. He had to keep that to himself. If Phil- Thanatos found out then- then-

"Tommy?" Thanatos was crouching down in front of him now, and holy shit Tommy hadn't even seen him move. *"Tommy, are you okay? What's wrong?"*

Taking a shaky breath, Tommy blinked rapidly, trying to clear his spinning vision. As Thanatos' face came into focus, that traitorous voice in the back of his head whispered one word.

Dad.

No. That wasn't right. Shaking his head to try and silence that stupid voice, Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, and scooted back so he was further away from Thanatos.

"I-I'm okay," he forced out through clenched teeth. "I just- I feel sick."

"Sick how? Like you're gonna throw up?"

Tommy shook his head again, forcing himself to take deep breaths to try and calm down.

"No, not like that. I think it's just, um, the hot air." Tommy needed to get out of this greenhouse as soon as possible. He needed to be alone in his room and bury himself under the blankets until his head learned how to shut the fuck up. "Can you take me back to my room?"

There was a pause. "Tommy, are you sure that's all that's going on?"

Fuck. He was suspicious. Fuck fuck fuck.

"I said it's the fucking hot air!" Tommy snapped, eyes flying open to glare at Thanatos. It was easier to pretend to be angry. Cling to the rage that warmed his blood instead of letting icy cold fear grip at his heart.

Thanatos blinked, startled by the outburst. Without a word, he nodded and slowly pushed to his feet, before holding out a hand for Tommy to help him up.

Tommy wanted to take it. It was almost painful for him to keep his arms down, but he knew that if he took the offered hand he might not be able to stop himself from just collapsing onto the villain.

So Tommy forced himself up on his own, and Thanatos dropped his hand. They left the greenhouse with dirt still scattered across the ground, and Tommy refused to meet Thanatos' eyes again for the entire walk back to his room.

Once they were at his door again, Tommy shifted from foot to foot as Thanatos twisted the key in the lock. He pushed it open and Tommy practically ran inside to slump against the side of his bed, and waited for the telltale click of the door to tell him Thanatos had left.

When the click didn't come, Tommy turned around and saw that Thanatos was watching him from the doorway.

The two stared each other down, with Thanatos opening and closing his mouth like he wanted to ask something. Tommy watched him with his heart thundering in his ears, silently begging the universe that Thanatos wouldn't ask him what he thought he wanted to ask.

It seemed the universe was on his side for once, because after a few beats, Thanatos sighed and shook his head. "Techno will be up here soon to bring you your dinner. Let him know if you need any medicine or anything."

Tommy nodded, the motion feeling stiff, like he was a doll being controlled by someone else. Thanatos spared him one last worried look, before he turned and let the door click shut

behind him.

As soon as Thanatos' footsteps faded down the hallway, Tommy groaned and shoved his face into his comforter. That memory- it didn't make sense. Maybe he had been forced to call Thanatos dad the last time he was here? Play make believe like they were some fucked up family?

(Tommy was grasping at straws and he knew it. It was like he was climbing up a sheer cliff face, and with every step up, he found fewer and fewer handholds to grab onto. Fewer ways to explain away the feelings, the memories as being just lies and nothing more. Soon he was going to be left with nothing else to grab, and his only option would be to fall.)

The picture frame still sat in the corner of the room, and he could feel the eyes of the figures in the photo watching him. His own silent stare lingered on the back of his neck, and Tommy shoved a pillow over his head to try and block it out.

It didn't work very well.



A few days after the Garden Incident, Tubbo and Ranboo came back over for the first time since Tommy's failed escape attempt.

Tommy wasn't sure what he expected from the two of them. A part of him wanted an apology, because they had kept him from escaping. But then again, what else had he thought was going to happen? He knew damn well that Tubbo and Ranboo were going to try and stop him, which was why he'd waited until both their backs were turned to make a run for it.

But still, the betrayal had felt like a searing hot knife in his chest. Tommy had wanted to trust them. That was stupid of him, but he could remember them, at least in a vague way. They had felt familiar to him and they were supposed to be in the same boat he was.

So Tommy wanted to be mad when Tubbo and Ranboo knocked on his door, with Ranboo shifting nervously while Tubbo was forcefully smiling like he was fighting to pretend nothing was wrong. He wanted to be mad but the second he saw the two of them, all of his anger just... turned to smoke.

Sue him, he missed his two best friends even if they had fucked him over. If Tommy cut them off, all he would have is the Syndicate, and obviously that wasn't ideal.

Without saying anything, Tommy gestured for the two of them to come sit next to him on the bed. Ranboo shuffled over and settled on his left side, while Tubbo plopped himself down on Tommy's right.

"I'm still pissed at both of you," Tommy said once they were settled, keeping his eyes on his lap instead of looking at either of them.

Ranboo sucked in a sharp breath, while from the corner of his eye, Tommy saw Tubbo nod like he'd been expecting that.

"That's fine. But I'm not apologizing for stopping you from leaving," Tubbo told him, his voice steady.

"I... I'm not sorry either," Ranboo added, although he sounded far more unsure than Tubbo had.

Tommy huffed. "Well, I'm not sorry for trying to escape." Then he glanced up, noticing faded red marks still scabbed over on Ranboo's arms, and winced. "I'm sorry about that though, Ranboo."

Ranboo blinked, seeming surprised as he realized Tommy was talking about his arms. "Oh, you don't need to apologize. I get it."

"I still hurt you though." Although he hadn't thought about it much at the time, as he stared at the scabbed over scratches, a dark pit formed in his stomach. Even if he was trying to escape, he didn't need to scratch Ranboo like that. All Ranboo was doing was holding him back.

Suddenly, Tommy straightened up. "Give me your arms."

"Huh?"

"Your arms, stretch them out," Tommy ordered.

For a moment, Ranboo seemed confused. Then his eyes widened with understanding.
"Tommy, no, you don't have to—"

"It's mostly healed anyway so it's barely gonna fucking hurt. C'mon, give me your goddamn arms or I'm gonna pin you down," Tommy insisted, holding out his hands.

Behind him, Tommy heard Tubbo sigh. "Just do it, Boo. You know he's not gonna shut up till you let him."

Sighing, Ranboo held out both his arms. Tommy placed his hands on top of the scratches, and closed his eyes as he focused on the warmth pooling in his palms. His face scrunches up as there was a tightness on his own arms, faint irritation and itching that came with the sensation of scabs forming on his skin. But it was easy to ignore, and after a few seconds, Tommy let go.

His own arms were clear of any scabs, as were Ranboo's. The itchiness faded after a few seconds, and the pit in Tommy's stomach became just a bit less heavy now that the scratches he'd left on his friend had been healed.

"So does this mean we're cool now?"

Tommy glanced behind him at Tubbo, who had his knees pulled up to his chest and was raising an expectant eyebrow at him.

"I wouldn't say we're 'cool' exactly," Tommy shrugged.

"Do you want us to leave?" Ranboo asked quietly.

Well, that was an easy one. Tommy immediately shook his head no, and Ranboo let out a sigh of relief while Tubbo broke out into a wide grin.

“Okay, if you’re not kicking us out then can we tell you why we came over?” Tubbo asked, practically bouncing in his seat.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “You mean you didn’t come over for my amazing company?”

Tubbo groaned while Ranboo huffed out a soft laugh, and Tommy let a small smile sneak onto his face for the first time since they’d entered the room. While things weren’t necessarily okay between the three of them, it seemed they were all content to shove that to the side for now, and Tommy wasn’t going to complain about that.

“Of course we came over to hang out with you, dumbass. But we’re also here for a reason,” Tubbo said, folding his arms over his chest. “I want us to have a movie night.”

“How the hell are we gonna have a movie night with no TV?” Tommy scoffed, gesturing to the TV-less room around them.

“We’re not gonna watch a movie here! We’re gonna go downstairs, where the big TV is!” Tubbo explained.

Wait, Tubbo wanted to bring Tommy downstairs *again*?

“The last time you two were my supervision out of this room I got, like, a foot from the door,” Tommy reminded him.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “Well obviously Phil’s not gonna make us be your only supervision. He’s got other security measures in place now, especially since he, Wil, and Techno are going out tonight.”

“Going out?” Tommy questioned. Did Tubbo mean they were going out to dinner? Or were they going out to do Syndicate-related things?

“I don’t know the details, man. But Phil gave us the okay to have a movie night with you downstairs,” Tubbo said, already pushing off the bed and grabbing Tommy’s wrist.

“C’monnnnn, we always hang out in this stuffy ass guest room and it’s so fucking boring! I wanna make popcorn and watch stuff in 4k!”

“We can have ice cream too since we didn’t get to have any last time,” Ranboo added, having grabbed Tommy’s other wrist so he could help Tubbo pull him off the bed.

Admittedly, Tommy was curious what these extra ‘security measures’ could be. If Thanatos was trusting Tommy alone with Tubbo and Ranboo again so soon, that had to mean they were foolproof. But what if they weren’t? Could Tommy get another chance so soon?

He’d have to see what measures Thanatos had put in place. If Tommy couldn’t get through them, then at least he’d get out of the room for a few hours to hang out and watch a movie.

"Alright, on one condition," Tommy said, letting himself be tugged off the bed and looking between his two friends. "I get to pick the movie."

"We're not watching *Up*," Tubbo told him, already dragging him towards the door.

Tommy frowned. "How did you know I was gonna say that one?"

Ranboo snorted. "Because that's what you always tried to choose for movie night."

Huh. Tommy shouldn't have been surprised, but it was still odd seeing how well these two knew him when it felt like he didn't even really know himself sometimes.

Tubbo opened the door, and led Tommy out while Ranboo held up the end. They hurried down the stairs, with Tubbo still tugging him along, and turned the corner into the living room with the green couch and black rug. But as soon as Tommy's eyes landed on the couch, he stopped dead in his tracks, and felt Ranboo slam right into his back.

There were two people in the living room. Of course Tommy recognized Circe, with her bright hair looking like it was recently redyed, sitting cross-legged on one side of the couch as she laughed at something her companion said.

Tommy didn't recognize the guy she was with though.

A young guy who only seemed a few years older than Tommy himself was stretched across the couch, grinning as he cracked another joke to Circe. He had a thin face with a shaved head, and when he cut off his joke mid sentence to look at the three of them, Tommy realized he had two different colored eyes.

One was a dark, deep blue. The other was such a dark shade of brown, it could've been red, like Acheron's.

Shaved head. Red and blue eyes. *Moros*.

The echo of fiery pain lancing through his body washed over him, and Tommy stumbled back as his breath caught in his throat.

"What the FUCK are they doing here?!" He hissed, gripping Tubbo and Ranboo's arms for dear life.

Both Circe and Moros were staring at him now, and Tommy did his best not to even glance in Moros' direction. He kept his eyes on Circe instead, flinching when she stood up from the couch, something pained crossing her face.

"Tubbo, did you not tell him?" Circe asked, furrowing her brows.

Tommy whipped his head to the right. "You knew they would be here?!"

Tubbo at least had the decency to look sheepish. "Um, yeah, y'know how I mentioned Phil put in extra security measures to make sure you couldn't escape again?"

Oh. Oh *fuck no*.

Circe and Moros were babysitters. They were here to make sure Tommy didn't escape again, because if Tommy so much as even looked at the door, Circe could puppet him like a doll and make him walk right back up to his room.

"You didn't think to tell me fucking Circe and Moros were gonna be with us?!" Tommy shouted, glaring at Tubbo. "What the hell, man!"

"I'm sorry! I didn't think it was a big deal!"

Tommy scoffed. "Oh yeah, it's not a big deal that we're gonna be sitting with the girl who fuckin' interrogated me with some weird ass truth serum shit and the guy who literally made me feel the worst pain I'd ever felt in my whole goddamn life. Yeah, definitely not a problem."

Tubbo's eyes widened at this. "Wait, I knew Niki questioned you but—" his head snapped back towards the couch. "Jack, when the fuck did you use your power on Tommy?"

"It was before we knew he was Lucid!" Moros—apparently named Jack—exclaimed. "I would've never done that shit if I knew it was Tommy!"

Rolling his eyes, Tommy was careful to keep his gaze away from Moros. "Ah, okay, that fucking excuse again. Alright Moros, you can say that all you want, but I'm not watching a goddamn movie with you and Circe anywhere nearby."

"Tommy, I'm serious. I never would've done that to you if I'd know who you were," Moros repeated, sounding genuinely upset. He took a step towards them, and although he was nothing but a blurry figure in the corner of Tommy's eye, he flinched back.

Ranboo put an arm over Tommy's shoulders. "Jack, uh, maybe stay back for now."

"I don't want them here," Tommy said, looking up at Ranboo. "I'm not staying down here with them."

"We can go back up to your room if you want?" Ranboo offered.

"Aw c'mon Tommy," Tubbo whined, and Tommy flinched at the sudden weight on his side. "I promise Niki and Jack won't do anything to you! If Jack even comes near you I'll put my force field on you. Powers don't work through my force fields."

Tommy thought back to the feeling of slamming his fists against invisible glass and had to suppress a shudder. "That's really not as comforting as you think it is."

"Tommy," Circe cut in, her voice soft, "if it makes you feel better, Jack and I don't have to sit on the couch with you guys. We can just drag some chairs over, since all we have to do is keep an eye on you."

That... Tommy still didn't like that. But it was an improvement over being piled on the damn couch with those two.

While the logical thing to do would just be to go back up to his room, Tommy was still very sick of being stuck in that room all the time. Plus, if he was up in his room, he wouldn't know what Circe and Moros were doing downstairs. It was better to be aware of both of them and what they were doing.

He didn't like it. But with the way Tubbo was whining next to him, Tommy also knew he probably wouldn't stop hearing Tubbo bitch about this for weeks if he refused to join in on movie night.

Letting out a deep sigh, Tommy lifted his head to meet Circe's eyes. "We get the couch, you guys have chairs. And if Moros so much as fucking looks in my direction, I'm out."

"Aw c'mon—"

"Jack," Circe said, cutting Moros off before he could complain. "You heard him. Grab us some chairs."

Groaning, Moros went to grab chairs from the dining room while Tubbo cheered and dragged him towards the couch. Ranboo ran towards the kitchen, presumably to get the aforementioned popcorn and ice cream, with Circe tailing after him.

A few minutes later, all of them were settled in the living room with their snacks, and Tommy felt like this should be the plot of a sitcom episode. An amnesiac, his brainwashed best friends, and two supervillains who tried to kill him have a movie night together. Fan-fucking-tastic.

In the end, Tommy got to choose the movie as long as it wasn't *Up*. He thought that was a stupid rule, but when he saw *Detective Pikachu* was an option, all of his complaints went out the window.

The movie started up, and Tommy took a heaping spoonful of chocolate ice cream straight out of the Ben and Jerry's carton, which he had checked to make sure was still sealed with plastic before he ate out of it. At first it was difficult to ignore the fact that Moros and Circe were sitting on either end of the couch, right in the corners of his peripheral vision, but thanks to the wonders of CGI Tommy was totally enraptured by Pikachu the moment he appeared onscreen.

Still, there was a tension in the air that weighed down on Tommy. The tension eased up as the movie went on, with Tommy slumping back against the couch more and more and not paying so much attention to whatever Moros was doing. At one point, Tommy realized his ice cream bowl had been empty for a while, and wasn't sure where to put it.

"Tubbo, take this to the kitchen for me," he said, shoving his bowl in Tubbo's direction.

Tubbo frowned and shoved the bowl back to him. "What the hell? No way! I'm not taking your dish for you!"

"I need to be supervised, remember?" Tommy told him, smirking at him. "Which means if I get up, Circe's gotta come with me. But if *you* get up to take these to the kitchen, you're the

only one who's gonna miss anything.”

Off to the side, Tommy heard Moros snicker, but ignored it as Tubbo's frown deepened.

“Fuck off! I'm not taking your dirty dishes for you. Ranboo can do it!”

Groaning, Ranboo slid down the couch until he was only half on it, with his own bowl resting on top of his chest. “I don't wanna get up,” he whined. “I haven't even seen this movie before. You guys have!”

“Well considering you three won't shut up, we're missing a shit ton of stuff right now,” Moros cut in between a mouthful of popcorn.

“Shut up, Jack,” Tubbo teased, grinning at him. “Why don't *you* take our dishes back for us?”

Moros made an affronted noise. “Why me?!”

“Because you used your messed up torture power on Tommy, so you owe him,” Ranboo pointed out.

Despite how fucked up saying something like the pain Moros put him through could be repaid by taking his dishes to the sink, Tommy found himself snorting at that, with Circe giggling as well.

“C'mon now, pulling out that card? That's just mean, Ranboo,” Moros complained.

“He's got a point,” Tommy chimed in, carefully keeping his eyes on the TV screen. “You *did* torture me. That really fucking hurt. I had nightmares about it for weeks.”

It was supposed to be a joke, in a dark humor kind of way. Yeah, it was fucked, but he was justifying making Moros pick up his dishes for him with it. It was supposed to get laughs from the others.

Instead though, Moros made some kind of choked noise, with everyone else going silent.

A few seconds passed, with no one seeming like they knew how to respond to that.

“C'mon guys, that was supposed to be funny!” Tommy groaned, dragging his hands down his face.

“Did you actually have nightmares though?” Ranboo asked quietly beside him.

Tommy blinked, feeling the weight of Moros and Circe's stares on him. He wasn't going to lie, but this was still uncomfortable as hell. Nodding slowly, Tommy tried to sink further back into the couch, wishing it could swallow him whole.

Well great. Now things were awkward. The only thing worse than watching a movie with two supervillains who tried to kill him once was having an awkward silence with two supervillains who tried to kill him once.

Huffing, Tommy reached behind his back for the throw pillow he was laying on. Yanking it out with a grunt, Tommy twisted to the side and slammed Tubbo in the face with the pillow as hard as he could.

“What the hell was that for!?” Tubbo yelped, his bowl clinking in his lap.

“You’re such a bitch, you should’ve just taken my dish for me!” Tommy said, smacking him again in the head.

“I’m the bitch? You’re the bitch!” Straightening up, Tubbo reached behind his back for his own pillow.

Meanwhile, Ranboo darted under Tommy’s arm and grabbed both bowls off his own and Tubbo’s laps. “Okay, I think now is a good time to take the dishes away.”

Now free of the bowl, Tommy swung his pillow at Tubbo’s face a third time. Tubbo blocked it with his own, his face stretching into a maniacal grin. “Are you sure you wanna do this, amnesia boy? You don’t remember any of my pillow fighting strategies.”

“Oh believe me, bee boy, I’m not afraid of you,” Tommy shot back. He wasn’t sure where the nickname ‘bee boy’ had come from, as it had just slipped out of his mouth without him thinking about it. Tubbo didn’t seem to question it though, his grin only growing as he leapt to his feet.

“It’s on, asshole!” Then, Tubbo smacked his pillow right into Tommy’s face.

Oh, it was *on*.

Jumping up, Tommy started swinging as much as he could at Tubbo. Tubbo screeched as he tried to block, ducking a few times and aiming for Tommy’s legs. Tommy kept advancing though, hitting him over and over again until Tubbo was pinned against the wall.

Before Tommy could make the killing blow though, he felt another pillow smack him in the back, and whirled around to see Ranboo with his own pillow in hand.

The three devolved into a full on pillow fight. Tommy screeched when Tubbo and Ranboo teamed up on him, curling into a ball to try and shield himself from their blows. Then, Ranboo seemed to change his mind, turning on a heel so he could start hitting Tubbo with his pillow.

Tommy leapt back up to his feet and joined in smacking on Tubbo. Ranboo disappeared from helping him against Tubbo, and from the corner of his eye, he could see Ranboo reaching over to smack Circe in the face with his pillow.

“Ranboo!” Circe gasped, although she didn’t sound angry. Instead of responding, Ranboo smacked her again with a wide grin stretched across his face, and Circe stood up.

“Alright then,” she said, reaching down to grab the pillow off her chair.

Tubbo noticed Circe picking up the pillow and laughed. “If Niki’s joining, I call smacking the shit out of Jack!”

Then, Tubbo ran over to where Moros was sitting and hit him over the head with the pillow.

“Oi! What the shit, man?! I was just minding my own—“ another smack cut Moros off midsentence, and before Tommy could get too worried about Moros joining the pillow fight, he felt a pillow whack him in the back of his head.

Whirling around, Tommy was face to face with Ranboo again, while Circe had joined Tubbo in attacking Moros. Figuring those two were distracted for now, Tommy slammed his pillow into Ranboo’s side, and Ranboo retaliated by hitting him in the cheek.

The pillow fight was a mess of giggles and shrieking. Tommy tried to stay away from Circe and Moros, but he kept getting distracted by either Ranboo or Tubbo hitting him. The more they fought, the less worried he was about those two. Tommy was breathless with laughter, his muscles warm from the exertion and his chest heaving for air. It had been such a long time since he’d laughed like this.

At one point Tommy tried to hit Tubbo, but Tubbo ducked at the last second, and Tommy gasped when his pillow slammed straight into Circe’s head.

He should’ve been afraid. Circe could control his blood and his heart, and now she was staring at him with a dangerous smile.

But there was no genuine anger behind her smirk. The only thing dancing her steely grey eyes was mirth, and out of more instinct than conscious joy, Tommy laughed when Circe lunged for him with the pillow.

He stumbled across the living room as Circe smacked at his legs, laughter making his chest ache while he tried to shield himself as best he could. He was so distracted by Circe though, he didn’t look where he was going, and found himself running into another body.

Tommy whipped around to see who he had run into, and found himself staring into a pair of brown and blue eyes.

Immediately all the laughter died in his chest. Fear lanced through him as his legs collapsed underneath him, the memory of Moros’ red and blue gaze flashing through his mind and making him shriek.

He waited for the pain as he stared up at Moros’ face. He waited to feel that horrible fire consuming his body again.

The seconds ticked by. There was no pain.

Something sad flickered over Moros’ face.

Tommy sat on the ground, breathing heavily as he finally tore his eyes away from Moros’ again. The pillow fight had stopped, and Tommy felt Tubbo and Ranboo crouch down on either side of him.

"Are you okay, Tommy?" Tubbo asked, looking between him and Moros with narrowed eyes.

"I- I didn't do anything. We bumped into each other and he turned around accidentally!" Moros stammered. "Tommy, mate, I'm never gonna use my powers on you again, I swear--"

"Jack, we know you'd never hurt him like that again," Circe said, resting her hand on Moros' arm.

This was wrong. All of this was wrong. Tommy was a hero. Tommy was Lucid, and here he was having a fucking pillow fight with Circe and Moros.

It had been so easy to lose himself in the laughter. To forget exactly who he was with, who was making him smile so hard his cheeks hurt.

He was with monsters. How the hell could he forget that?

Scrambling to his feet, Tommy ignored Tubbo's questions and shook his friends hands off his arms.

"I'm going to my room," he said gruffly, keeping his head down.

Then, without waiting for a response, he sprinted to the stairs. Someone followed him but he didn't bother to see who it was, just ran up the stairs as fast as he could, his mind spinning with far too many thoughts at once.

Running into his room, Tommy gasped in relief at finally being away from Circe and Moros. He twisted his fingers into his hair and bent over to catch his breath, an indescribable mix of anger and sadness twisting in his gut.

"Tommy?" Ranboo said softly, shutting the door behind him. "You okay?"

Glancing up, Tommy saw that it was only him and Ranboo in the room. Tubbo must've stayed downstairs with Circe and Moros.

Tommy shook his head, collapsing onto the edge of his bed with his fingers still in his hair. "No, no I'm not fucking okay."

The bed dipped as Ranboo settled himself next to Tommy. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

What was there to even talk about? Tommy's head was a jumbled mess of emotions that didn't feel like his own, memories that had to be his but didn't make any sense, and the gradual realization that he might not have been the person he thought he was.

It had been too easy to slip into the pillow fight with Circe and Moros. It had been too easy to forget who they were, what they had done. Far too easy.

"How do you do it?" Tommy found himself croaking out, keeping his eyes on his lap. "You don't seem like a bad person, Ranboo. How do you justify being friends with these murderers?"

Ranboo took a shaky breath, and Tommy noticed him wringing his hands. “Tommy, do you remember the story of how Tubbo and I joined the Syndicate?”

Tommy shook his head.

“Well, we weren’t kidnapped,” Ranboo began, a weak chuckle falling flat to the ground between them. “Um, basically Tubbo and I had gotten screwed over by a lot of things. We’d both been in foster care, and I can’t remember most of it, but according to Tubbo we were put in the same house at one point and became best friends. Again, I can’t remember this house, but Tubbo says they weren’t... good. Not to either of us. We tried telling our social worker, but he didn’t- he just didn’t care. No one cared. So we ran away.”

Nodding, Tommy thought of how he was all too familiar with that situation.

“Living on our own was really hard, because we had to hide from cops and all that. I remember more after we left, though it’s still a bit spotty,” Ranboo continued. “That was when Tubbo came up with a pretty insane idea, and that was to try and get the Syndicate to protect us from the police.”

“What the fuck?” Tommy snapped his head up to frown at Ranboo. “You thought the Syndicate would protect you?”

Ranboo smiled sheepishly. “In retrospect it’s pretty dumb, but we were both 14 at the time and thought it sounded like a great idea. We both knew our powers were pretty rare, so we wanted to propose a business deal with them.”

“A business deal?”

“Yup. We needed to get their attention, and we know the one thing the Syndicate doesn’t like is crime they’re not the cause of in their territory. So we, uh, became villains.”

Tommy gaped. “You and Tubbo-“

“We never really got on the news because we only robbed a few convenience stores. But it was enough to get the Syndicate to notice us,” Ranboo said, looking a bit calmer as he got into the story. “One night after we had robbed a place, we got cornered by Orpheus, Acheron, and Thanatos. I think their plan was to try and intimidate us into stopping, but Tubbo turned it into a negotiation. We both had really powerful abilities that they’d seen in action, so if they offered us the protection of the Syndicate, we’d work for them.”

What the fuck? Tubbo and Ranboo had negotiated their way into joining the Syndicate?

“Once Phil realized we were fourteen he immediately changed the deal so that we wouldn’t actually start working for the Syndicate till we turned eighteen. But we got protection from the cops, we got our own apartment from Phil, and soon enough we started thinking of the Syndicate as our family more than just our business partners,” Ranboo explained, his shoulders dropping with the last sentence.

Tommy stared at Ranboo in shock as he tried to process all this new information. Tubbo and Ranboo hadn't been kidnapped by the Syndicate at all. They'd literally negotiated their way in, asked to join and made it into a balanced partnership.

They weren't victims like him. They were full blown villains, the same as the rest of them.

He should be angry. He should shove Ranboo away and yell at him to leave his room, because Ranboo was just like the others. There was no justification for him to be friends with him or Tubbo now.

But Tommy didn't do any of those things. Instead, he brought his knees up to his chest, and hid his face behind them.

"If... If I wasn't kidnapped like you guys keep saying," Tommy began, his voice wavering as he spoke, "how did- what did I think? Of all the villain stuff?"

His heart was pounding in his ears as Ranboo took a beat to answer.

"Honestly, you never seemed to care much about what the Syndicate did. If anything, you supported it," Ranboo said softly, and Tommy winced.

"But- But how did I support it? How did I support them hurting innocent people?" Tommy whispered.

"Ever since I met you, you always seemed like you were just... holding a lot of anger inside of you," Ranboo explained. "Like me and Tubbo, you'd gotten screwed over a lot by the city. By people who were supposed to protect you but didn't. Sometimes you'd say that if you could keep your family—the Syndicate—and burn the whole city to the ground, you would."

And Tommy-

He could hear himself saying that as a memory floated back into his mind.

"Y'know Ranboo, if I could, I'd turn this whole fucking place to ash. Destroy this entire fucked up city and all the fucked up people in it. Everyone except us, our family.

That couldn't be right. That couldn't be. He'd never say that. He wasn't that kind of person.

But Tommy was once again looking at his emotions through the eyes of someone else. He could remember the burning hot rage that had simmered in his chest as he told Ranboo that, the way his hands curled into fists and his head spun with the memories of everyone who had fucked him over before he found his family.

"That- That's not me! I'm not like that!" Tommy gasped, tugging on his hair so hard pain was starting to flash through his skull.

"You're not like that now. But you used to be," Ranboo told him, resting a hand on his shoulder.

Tommy couldn't breathe. This wasn't true. He wasn't that cruel of a person. He was a good person. He was a *hero*.

But Ranboo's words were telling him otherwise. His own memories were telling him otherwise.

Without really thinking about it, Tommy shifted off the bed so he was standing again. His heartbeat thudded in his ears like a sharp and deafening song. His head was spinning as he wandered over to the picture frame laying on the ground in the corner of the room. The picture he'd refused to acknowledge, not even bothering to clean up the glass that had been scattered around it for weeks.

On auto-pilot, Tommy knelt down and picked up the picture that still made his chest ache to look at. He traced his fingers over his own smiling face again, before letting his eyes drift to the others. Orpheus, Thanatos, and Acheron. All of them seemed happy, but Tommy was the happiest of the four.

The first time Tommy had seen this, he'd scoffed at the idea he could ever have been friends with monsters, let alone think of them as family. But that single line kept replaying in his head. About how he wanted to burn the city to the ground.

Was Tommy a monster too? Had they all been a happy family of monsters?

Tommy didn't know. He didn't know anything anymore and he was getting a migraine from trying to wrap his head around it all. His hands shook the longer he clutched the picture between his fingers. The ice cream he'd eaten earlier threatened to make a reappearance, and he could feel Ranboo's eyes lingering on him as he slumped down against the wall.

A small shard of glass embedded itself in his foot. Tommy winced, but didn't bother to move it.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Tommy heard Ranboo get up and walk towards him. He waited for Ranboo to say something, but he just heard a quiet shifting as Ranboo sat down next to him.

Tommy was holding onto the photo with one hand, and had the other curled so tightly into a fist, he could feel his nails digging into his palm. Ranboo's hand wrapped over his, encouraging him to open the fist, and the small cuts created by his fingernails stung against the open air.

They stayed like that for a while. Sitting silent against the wall as Tommy's breathing began to slow, Ranboo gently squeezing his fingers every few seconds to remind Tommy he was there.

None of this made sense. Tommy was so goddamn tired of trying to make sense of what was going on anymore.

Soon, Tommy distantly heard a door open downstairs, and loud voices echoed up through the hallway. Tommy opened his eyes and saw Ranboo had left the door to his room cracked open.

“Seems like Phil, Wil, and Techno are home,” Ranboo said, squeezing Tommy’s hand again.

They were back, most likely from doing Syndicated related things. Hurting people. Innocent people, most likely.

And yet, there was a hook tugging at his chest again. To go see them. To make sure they weren’t hurt. A protective instinct that felt like it shouldn’t belong to him, but did at the same time.

He could just go downstairs to take a peek and make sure they were alright, right?

His want must’ve been obvious on his face, because Ranboo pushed to his feet, and tugged Tommy up alongside him. “C’mon, let’s go say hi,” he said gently.

Nodding, Tommy reached down to pull the glass shard out of his foot. It was tiny enough that there was only a small spot of blood on his sock, but Ranboo still winced at the sight.

“It’s fine,” Tommy reassured him. Although Ranboo seemed unsure, he nodded anyway, and grabbed Tommy’s hand to tug him along.

As they made their way down the stairs, Tommy could hear the voices getting louder. He could make out Circe’s soft pitch and Tubbo’s loud excitement, followed by Thanatos’ gentle amusement.

Ranboo led Tommy into the kitchen, and all conversation immediately fell silent. Glancing around, Tommy saw Thanatos still in his robes, but his usual veil was gone. He was leaning against the counter, and seemed to have been in the middle of a conversation with Tubbo. Acheron and Moros were standing in front of the sink, with Acheron’s skull mask placed next to him on the granite countertop, his hair still pinned up with all his braids.

Then, Tommy noticed Orpheus and Circe sitting at the island counter. Orpheus seemed to be staring off into space, his opera mask nowhere to be seen, but dark makeup lining under his eyes all the same. Circe was holding his hand, talking to him in hushed whispers that cut off when Tommy walked in.

The group was silent for a moment, all eyes weighing heavy on him. Tommy shrunk into Ranboo’s side.

“Hey mate,” Thanatos said after a few moments, his voice gentle. “Niki told us what happened earlier. You feeling alright?”

Tommy clenched his jaw, hating how warm Thanatos’ concern made him feel. “I’m fine,” he snapped, letting go of Ranboo’s hand to take another step into the kitchen. “Just didn’t want to be stuck hanging out with these assholes.” He gestured to Circe and Moros, and while Moros frowned, Circe didn’t even glance in his direction, keeping her focus on Orpheus.

Orpheus was acting... strange. Tommy looked at him again, waiting for Orpheus to meet his eyes, to either smile at him or make that same sad face he always made whenever Tommy frowned at him for too long.

But he didn't do any of that. In fact, Orpheus seemed to be the only one in the room that hadn't noticed he was there. His dark eyes were glazed over, and his hand was limp where Circe was grabbing it.

Dread crept up the back of Tommy's throat the longer he stared at Orpheus' blank expression. It was unsettling to say the least.

"What's wrong with him?" Tommy asked in a much softer voice this time.

"D'you know what dissociation is, Tommy?" Acheron asked, folding his arms over his chest.

Tommy frowned. Dream had taught him about that once, when during a fight, Hourglass had gone weirdly quiet and wouldn't respond to anything. Dream had told Tommy to drag him off to the side, and Tommy had guarded him until Dream had dispatched the thieves they were fighting.

"It's when you're, um, not really all there, right? You're kinda disconnected from everything?"

Acheron nodded. "Pretty much. When Wilbur possesses someone for too long, he's usually pretty out of it after he leaves the body. It only lasts for a bit, but Niki's trying to ground him right now to help him come back faster."

Oh.

Now Tommy could see Circe was trying to trace circles into the back of his hand, trying to provide some physical touch for him to latch onto so he could pull himself back down to reality.

The longer Tommy stared at Orpheus' blank expression, the more pronounced the dread inside of him became. But it wasn't just dread. It was also... guilt? Sadness?

That tugging in his chest was back, and it was stronger than it had ever been before. His eyes lingered on the circles Circe was drawing on the back of Orpheus' hand, because he knew that was wrong. That wasn't going to help him.

Tommy wasn't sure what possessed him to walk over to the island counter and gesture for Circe to get off the chair next to him. Maybe it was because of his talk with Ranboo only a few minutes before, or maybe it was because just seeing Wilbur's face so blank and empty was terrifying to him. Either way though, Circe hopped off the chair without a word, and Tommy found himself sitting next to Wilbur, who didn't even glance in his direction.

The motions came as naturally to him as breathing. Tommy didn't think as he uncurled Wilbur's fingers, stretching his hand flat against the table and flipping it over so it was palm up. Tommy didn't think as he gently began to pinch the tips of Wilbur's fingers—not hard enough to hurt, just enough for him to feel it. Tommy didn't think as he began to whisper reassurances that echoed through his ears, ones he'd said dozens of times before.

"Hey Wil, can you feel this?" Tommy asked, not even registering that this was the first time he hadn't called him Orpheus. "I'm pinching your fingers right now. You can feel it, can't you? Just focus on your hand."

Wilbur didn't respond. Tommy could feel the eyes of everyone in the room weighing on him, but he ignored all of it.

"Here," Tommy lifted Wilbur's hand so it was pressed against his forehead. "Can you feel my head? It's kind of sweaty, right? We had a pillow fight earlier, so that's why. Kind of gross honestly. Might take a shower later."

Tommy had no clue what the fuck he was saying at this point. He just needed to say words, give Wilbur something to latch onto, to know he was there.

Suddenly, Wilbur blinked. Although he didn't turn to look at Tommy, his hand tensed ever so slightly, and Tommy grinned. He pulled Wilbur's hand off his forehead, and went back to pinching and moving his fingers around at random, just trying to be as gentle as possible.

"C'mon Wilbur, you can feel this. I know you can," Tommy told him, repeating the motions.

Wilbur blinked again, his brows furrowing for a moment. He finally turned his head in Tommy's direction, although his eyes still seemed glazed over.

"Hey, you're right here, Wil," Tommy whispered, continuing to pinch his fingers. "You're in the kitchen. We're sitting at the counter."

Slowly, Wilbur's fingers curled around his own, squeezing his hand as he took a deep breath.

"Wil, if you can hear me, can you name five things you see right now?" Tommy asked, squeezing his hand in return.

"Um... Phil," Wilbur whispered, his voice so soft, it was even hard for Tommy to hear it. "I see Phil. And... And Techno. The fridge."

"That's three things. What are two more?"

"The coffee machine," Wilbur continued, squeezing Tommy's hand tighter. "And, um, the light."

Tommy nodded. "Now can you tell me four things you feel?"

Wilbur huffed a bit at this. "I feel your hand." He flattened his other palm over the countertop. "I feel the granite, it's cold."

They continued with this for several minutes. After Wilbur had said four things he could feel, Tommy then asked him three things he could hear, two things he could smell, and one thing he could taste.

Tommy didn't remember when he'd learned this grounding method. It was just there, in his head, like knowing how to pinch Wilbur's hand to get him to come back faster, or what

things to say to get him to realize where he was.

It was strangely calming, and Tommy forgot all about their audience as Wilbur slowly tethered himself back into his body. Finally, after what felt like ages, the glazed over look in his eyes disappeared, and he focused on Tommy completely.

“How here are you now?” Tommy asked, Wilbur still holding onto his hand.

“I think, um, eighty percent?” Wilbur answered, eyebrows scrunching together. He reached out his other hand, a silent question, and Tommy put his hand on top without any hesitation. Wilbur was now holding both his hands, and Tommy squeezed his fingers, something warm blooming in his chest when Wilbur immediately squeezed back.

There was a moment of silence as Wilbur stared at their hands. Then, he glanced up again. “I’ve missed you, Toms,” he whispered, the ghost of a smile hinted on his lips.

It was then Tommy realized that Wilbur... Wilbur looked hopeful. Relieved, almost.

Fuck. Not again.

Swallowing down the *I’ve missed you too* that was lodged in his throat, Tommy instead forced himself to squeeze Wilbur’s hands one last time, before untangling their fingers and pulling his hands away. His heart pounded in his ears as he got off the chair, his arms aching with how much he wanted to run forward and wrap Wilbur in a hug.

But this was Orpheus. *Orpheus*, who was out of it because he had possessed someone. Controlled them against their will.

A shiver ran down Tommy’s spine as he took a step away from the counter. Realization dawned on Wilbur’s face, and Tommy hated how badly it hurt to see the way everything inside of him seemed to deflate at that.

“You still don’t remember,” Wilbur said softly.

Tommy shook his head. “I don’t.” He took another step backwards, still ignoring the eyes watching him from the kitchen. “I’m, um, gonna go to my room now.”

Turning around, Tommy braced himself to hurry back to the stairs.

Before he could get a step through the archway though, something inside of him forced him to pause.

“...I’m sorry,” he whispered, so low he wasn’t even sure if Wilbur would be able to hear it.

And then, before Wilbur could respond, Tommy rushed out of the kitchen and to the stairs before running straight to his room.

SO A LOT HAPPENED but god that scene with tommy grounding wilbur has literally been in my head since I first came up with the idea for this fic aaaaa i really hope you guys enjoyed that part

also dad moment hehe

SLOWLY BUT SURELY WE ARE GETTING SOMEWHERE! very excited to finally get into more memories now that tommy is finally starting to accept his memories might not tell him what he wants to hear lmao, he's really going through it

fun stuff time! I have a discord server <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE> go join it to chat about my fics!

I have a spotify playlist for this fic as well! check it out [here](#)

anyway I really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, I had a lot of fun writing it because there was so much I've imagined for so long that finally got to happen. please let me know what you thought down in the comments below, I don't respond to most but I read them all and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

flower fields in your dreams

Chapter Summary

Tommy is more confused than ever.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone it is me! i am back with what is possibly my FAVORITE chapter of this entire story so far. I just took a final so I'm a little braindead, and I have another final tomorrow that I need to go study for, but I finished this the other night in a haze of speedwriting and I wanted to get it out to you all when I could

this chapter is just *clenches fist* aaaaa

hope you guys enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Why did I do that? Why the fuck did I do that?”

Tommy was whispering to himself as he paced around his room, his hands still warm from where they'd been holding onto Wilbur's. His heart was pounding in his ears as he thought back to only minutes before, how it was like there had been someone else controlling his body when he'd done the grounding routine on Wilbur to stop him from dissociating.

He could remember it now. Sitting on the couch, glowing moonlight creating slits of light across the floor, holding Wilbur's hands as he asked him to name the things he could see. Sometimes, when the usual grounding methods didn't work, Tommy would just hug him, and when Wilbur would eventually lift his arms up to hug Tommy back, he knew he was starting to fall back down to reality.

But... But just because he'd helped Orpheus ground himself, that didn't mean it was all true, right?

The excuse was weak, and Tommy knew it. But he wasn't going to let himself dwell on the implications of all of that. He couldn't. It was too much for him to consider right now. Not when he was still so raw from everything else that had happened that night.

Stopping his pacing, Tommy found the family picture sitting on the edge of his bed. Staring at it for too long brought back that horrible ache in his chest, so he walked over to his nightstand, sliding open the drawer and gently tucking the photo inside.

Then, he walked over to the corner where the broken frame was still laying. He crouched down and picked up the glass shards as gently as he could, piling them in his palm before taking them to the bathroom trash can to throw them out.

Tommy felt hollow.

There was something he wanted. Something he desperately missed. It made his skin buzz with restlessness, and he went back to his pacing for lack of anything better to do.

He hated this. Although Tommy kept thinking that to himself, it didn't make it any less true. His head was a mess of memories that didn't fit, and a part of Tommy wanted nothing more than to smash his head into a wall until he lost all his memories all over again.

This halfway place between remembering and not remembering, of not knowing who the hell he'd been or who on earth he was supposed to be now—this was the worst kind of purgatory he could imagine. Nothing was right, nothing made sense, and Tommy was just so completely and hopelessly lost.

A soft knock at his door violently snapped him out of his thoughts.

"Hello?" He called out, wincing at how rough his voice was.

"Tommy?" His chest squeezed hearing Wilbur right outside his door. Of course it was him. Of course he was going to want to talk to Tommy after whatever the hell had happened in the kitchen. "Can we talk?"

And again, Tommy wanted to say no. But the things he wanted didn't seem to match up at all with the things he did, because he found his mouth forming a, "yeah," before he could even think twice about it.

Wilbur phased through the door again, still fully dressed in his Orpheus outfit. He'd taken his shoes off though, and Tommy almost wanted to laugh when he saw Wilbur was wearing mismatched socks.

There wasn't enough energy left in him to laugh right now though, so he just stood in the middle of his room, arms folded over his chest as Wilbur walked towards him.

They stared at each other for a few moments in silence, brown eyes meeting blue, and Tommy hated how he could tell his face was a mirror image of Wilbur's at that moment. Sadness and confusion taking center stage in the lines of Wilbur's forehead and the downturned corners of Tommy's lips.

"Do you wanna sit?" Tommy offered after a moment, gesturing to the bed.

Wilbur nodded. Tommy sat cross-legged on top of his comforter, with Wilbur following suit. His coat hung off the edge of the bed, and the makeup under his eyes was badly smudged. He looked exhausted.

The silence between them was like a wire stretched taut. There were so many things Wilbur clearly wanted to ask, and there was absolutely nothing Tommy wanted to answer.

The string snapped when Wilbur spoke.

"Can... Can you tell me what, um," he paused, squeezing his eyes shut before blinking a few times and refocusing on Tommy. "Sorry, um, I'm still a bit out of it."

Oh right. He'd told Tommy he was only eighty percent back when he'd left.

Sighing, Tommy reached for Wilbur's hand, pressing Wilbur's knuckles against his own forehead.

"Feel how warm my forehead is," Tommy muttered, gaze dropping to the blankets.

Wilbur was quiet for a moment. The knuckles against his forehead shifted slightly, but Wilbur didn't pull back, and Tommy waited a few seconds. Then, he pushed Wilbur's hand away from his head, and opened up his hand to start messing with his fingers.

It wasn't the same pinching as before. Tommy just let his muscle memory guide him as he curled and uncurled Wilbur's fingers, refusing to look up to see the man's face.

"Why are you doing this?" Wilbur whispered. "If you don't remember, why- *how* do you even know how to do this?"

Tommy winced, but kept his eyes down on Wilbur's hand, continuing to mess with it at random as he tried to figure out how to answer that.

"It's... I don't know. I just don't think about it. Like it's muscle memory or something," Tommy said quietly. "I didn't think about it downstairs. I saw you sitting there staring off into space and it just felt wrong. Next thing I knew I was sitting down next to you."

There was another beat of silence. Then,

"Tommy, do you really not remember anything?"

A part of Tommy knew he should tell him. But the words lodged themselves in his throat, his chest seizing up the more he thought about admitting that he did remember some bits and pieces.

The thing was, Tommy didn't understand the memories he'd gotten back. He didn't understand how they were real, what they meant—he still needed to try and understand what was going on in his own head before he told others what was happening. It just... it wasn't something he wanted Wilbur, or anyone else, to know.

"I don't," Tommy lied. "Nothing concrete."

Wilbur sighed, and the hand Tommy was messing with curled in. Wilbur's fingers wrapped around his, and Tommy huffed as he kept his eyes stubbornly on his lap.

"You used to do this a lot," Wilbur told him, speaking in a low voice despite the fact that it was just the two of them. "You would help ground me in all the same ways you're doing now. Somehow, you just figured out how to do it faster than anyone else could."

Tommy knew that. He knew that he'd done this countless times before, and that he was the only one who knew how to do it *right*.

Squeezing Wilbur's hand again, Tommy noticed something he hadn't picked up on earlier. Wilbur's fingertips were callused, with thick, white skin indented in a pattern that Tommy didn't exactly recognize, but had a pretty good guess for what caused it.

"Do you play guitar?" Tommy asked, his heart pounding in his ears.

Wilbur nodded. "I do. I write my own songs sometimes too."

The song his brother sang to him still rang in Tommy's ears. Tommy knew what that implied. He knew that if he added up all the puzzle pieces about Wilbur, it would give him a pretty good idea of who he might've been to Tommy before, and that terrified him like nothing else.

He wanted to tell himself that couldn't be true, but he wasn't sure what the truth even was anymore.

His brother might not be dead. He might be a living ghost, one who doesn't want to hurt others but feels like he can't escape the ring he's ensnared himself into.

Tommy's breathing hitched, and he shook his head to try and clear that thought from his mind. That was something he didn't want to think about right now. He didn't want to think of what the implications to that were—what that meant for his beliefs, for the person he used to be.

He filed that thought away in the back of his mind. He didn't want to consider it, but... he couldn't reject it outright either.

"What are you thinking about?" Wilbur suddenly asked, cutting through Tommy's racing thoughts. "What's going on in your head?"

"I... I don't know," Tommy confessed in a near whisper, tightening his grip on Wilbur's hand. "It's all- it's all just so much. So many feelings that I don't understand, so many things I've heard about the person I used to be that just doesn't sound like *me*." His voice cracked, and he winced. "Feel like I'm trapped on one of those upside down fucking rollercoasters, with things going faster and faster and next thing I know everything's being turned on it's damn head."

Wilbur let out a wounded noise. "That... fuck, man. That sounds awful." While the hand Tommy was holding stayed in place, Wilbur lifted his other hand up, and something warm pressed against his cheek, tilting his head up until he met Wilbur's eyes. "It's so easy to focus on how this shit affects me and Phil and Techno, but god just- you must be going through hell."

Tears burned in Tommy's eyes as he leaned into the hand on his face. "It's so confusing," he admitted softly. "Nothing makes sense anymore. The more I learn the less I understand, I feel like I can't trust my own fucking head and I just- I have no fucking clue what's going on

anymore.” His breathing hitched again, and he felt a single tear roll down his cheek. “I miss when everything made sense.”

A thumb swiped the tear off his face. “Can I hug you?” Wilbur asked.

And Tommy-

He couldn’t say no. Not like this.

He nodded and Wilbur dropped his hand, scooting forward to wrap his arms around Tommy’s back. Tommy buried his face in Wilbur’s shoulder. He didn’t start sobbing again, not like before, but he took several shuddering breaths to try and calm himself as Wilbur ran a hand up and down his back.

“I shouldn’t be doing this,” Tommy told him, his voice muffled by the fabric of Wilbur’s coat. “I- I should pull away. I shouldn’t be hugging you but I just- I don’t want to stop.”

“Let me know when you want to let go,” Wilbur told him. “Just stay as long as you want.”

The hug was so achingly familiar. Tommy didn’t want to pull away. He just wanted to stay like that, letting the pounding in his head go quiet for just a moment. A temporary peace in the war zone that was his own mind.

So he didn’t let go. Wilbur didn’t either.



The next day, Acheron brought Tommy his breakfast. At first, Tommy thought he was going to get off scot free, and Acheron wasn’t going to ask him about what had happened the night before.

But of course, Tommy wasn’t that lucky.

“So,” Acheron began once Tommy had torn open the plastic wrapping on his sandwich, “last night was a lot.”

Huffing, Tommy avoided Acheron’s eyes as he took a bite of the rubbery turkey sandwich meat. “You can say that again.”

He waited for Acheron to ask him why he had been able to ground Wilbur if he didn’t have any memories. He waited for Acheron to see through his lies and call him out on his bullshit. He waited because Acheron could look straight inside of him sometimes, and it was terrifying.

But Acheron didn’t bring up Wilbur.

“Niki told me you got a bit freaked out seeing Jack,” Acheron said, folding his hands in his lap.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “I mean, he’s used his powers on me before. It’s not fun.”

"No, I'd imagine it's not," Acheron agreed, nodding once. "But Jack isn't the only person here who's hurt you."

A phantom ache rushed through his arms as he remembered how painful it was to try and block Acheron's sword during their first fight.

"No, he's not," Tommy agreed, keeping his eyes on his lap.

Silence pressed heavily on Tommy's shoulders. He wasn't sure if Acheron was waiting for him to say more, or if he was just trying to figure out what to say next. Either way, Tommy stayed silent, because he had no idea what Acheron was trying to prove with this conversation.

After a little over a full minute of silence, his patience was rewarded.

"I'm not, uh, the best with words and stuff," Acheron said, wringing his hands together. "But I just wanted to make sure you were, um, doing alright. Especially after all that."

Tommy blinked. "Are you trying to comfort me?"

"I dunno, man. I'm not really good at this stuff," Acheron exclaimed. "Just, like, do you need anything? I know we've been pressurin' you to remember this whole time, but it's gotta be pretty damn hard for you staying with us like this. I don't really know how to make this situation any better, but I can tell it's stressing you out."

The familiar taunt of *let me go* sat on the tip of his tongue, but Tommy couldn't find the strength to actually say the words.

Instead, a different question formed in Tommy's mind. One he had been wondering over and over again for the past few days, but had been too afraid to put into words.

Taking a shaky breath, Tommy pulled his knees up to his chest. "You don't, uh, mince words, right? You don't really try to make things sound better than they were or bullshit me."

Acheron frowned, but nodded. "People tell me I'm a bit blunt sometimes, yeah."

Tommy snorted. "They tell me that too," he muttered, running a hand through his hair. Then he took another breath to steady himself, figuring if there was a time to ask this, he might as well ask now. "What... What was I to you all? Because I've got an idea of what you all say we were, but no one's really said it straight up."

The answer was going to be family. Tommy knew that. But he wanted to hear someone else say it.

"You were Phil's son," he said quietly, pink strands of hair hanging over his face, "and you were my little brother." He paused, wincing. "I'm the oldest. I was supposed to- I'm not supposed to let anything happen to you or Wilbur. Especially not you. But I failed. And you paid the price for it."

Something inside of Tommy's chest squeezed, and he almost gasped with how much it hurt.

“You didn’t fail,” Tommy said without thinking. “It’s not your fault.”

Techno raised an eyebrow. “We’re all partially at fault for what happened. Wilbur blames himself the most, but I’m the one that’s supposed to protect all of us. I didn’t do that with you.”

“I don’t like hearing you blame yourself,” Tommy admitted, his voice low. “Doesn’t feel right.”

“I thought you hated me though,” Techno pointed out, lifting his head. “I thought you hated all of us. Why would that upset you if you hate us?”

Squeezing his eyes shut, Tommy buried his face in his knees. “I should. I *did*.”

He did. He had hated all of them so much only a few weeks before. Tommy remembered staring at Acheron that first day after he’d woken up from Circe’s influence, the pure rage that shook his voice as he spat his hatred at the man.

It was gone. That heat, that anger—it was gone. And all that was left was that horrible, aching hollowness.

He heard shifting from the chair, and then felt the mattress dip as Techno sat down beside him. “Past tense?”

Tommy’s breathing hitched. “I want to hate you.”

If there was a switch Tommy could use to turn on that rage again, he would do it. It would be so much easier to be angry instead of sad. To not feel like his entire world was caving in on itself.

“But you don’t.”

There was no switch though. The anger was gone.

“I don’t,” Tommy choked out.

Once again, all those confusing feelings were swirling through his head and his chest and it was making him so dizzy he wanted to throw up. Why was hearing Techno so upset the thing that made the last vestiges of his anger wither away and die? Why did it no longer feel like there was some elaborate scheme going on?

Why did Tommy feel so guilty? Why was there this ache weighing down his shoulders and forming a pit in his gut every time he remembered that he was the reason why they all looked so sad?

“I’m sorry you have to go through this,” Techno said softly.

Shoving down the urge to cry again, Tommy whispered, “I’m sorry you do too.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes, neither one making any moves to get closer. But at the same time, Tommy didn't feel the urge to scoot away. They were almost shoulder to shoulder, and there was a comfort that came with the broad-shouldered presence beside him.

Eventually, Tommy started eating his sandwich again. It tasted like sand in his mouth, but he ate it anyway, and Techno didn't leave until he was finished.

As Techno stood up with the trash in his hand, he paused, turning back to look at Tommy.

He reached out, and Tommy didn't flinch as Techno ruffled his hair. Warmth bloomed in his chest at the gesture, and he was left speechless as Techno walked out of the room, letting the door click shut behind him.



The next day, Tommy nearly jumped out of his skin when Wilbur phased through his door without any prior warning.

“Tommy!” He called out, looking more cheerful than Tommy had seen him in his entire time with the Syndicate.

“Fucking hell, dude!” Tommy yelped, nearly dropping his Switch in surprise. “You could've fucking knocked!”

Guilt flashed over Wilbur's face. “Oh shit, uh, sorry. I really gotta get better about that, I scared the shit out of Techno a few days ago too,” Then, almost as quickly as it appeared, the guilt was gone and replaced with a wide grin. “But that's besides the point. Today I have something for us to do.”

Tommy frowned. “Like what?”

It was startling to see how drastically different Wilbur was acting to a few days before, when he could barely look Tommy in the eye without seeming like he wanted to cry. While there was still a measure of sadness in the lines around his eyes, it was barely noticeable, and Tommy wondered if it had something to do with the grounding incident from the other day.

“Well, how would you like to get out of the house for a bit?” Wilbur asked.

Blinking, Tommy had to take a second to make sure he heard Wilbur correctly.

“You... You want to take me outside?”

Wilbur nodded. “Yup. I gotta go to Las Nevadas today for some business, and I figured it might be nice for you to get out of this stuffy house.”

Oh.

Las Nevadas. Suddenly Wilbur's plan made far more sense.

If they had just been going out into a public place, this would've been an extremely risky move. Tommy could dart away at any second, or scream for help with strangers all around. But at Las Nevadas, they would be on Dionysus' turf, with guards at all the exits and every patron operating under the mantra of *if something strange happens, look the other way*.

While a part of Tommy was resistant to the idea of going to Las Nevadas, especially if Wilbur was there to do Syndicate related business, he had to admit... the offer was tempting. Even if he couldn't find a possible route of escape, at the very least, he'd have something to do instead of just playing *Animal Crossing* all day.

"Okay," Tommy agreed, sitting up and tossing his Switch to the side. "I'll go."

A few minutes later, Tommy was dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, despite the fact that that wasn't necessarily appropriate attire for a high end place like the casino. Wilbur seemed to fit the dress code a bit better, wearing a collared shirt layered under a dark sweater and gold-rimmed glasses on his nose—similar to what he'd been wearing the first time Tommy ran into him at Las Nevadas.

Apparently Dionysus had sent a chauffeur to come collect the two of them, which wasn't fucking weird *at all* and why was Wilbur just okay with that? When they were about to head out the front door, Wilbur had apologized and covered Tommy's eyes, saying that Techno still didn't want Tommy to know where their house was. That was fair enough, so Tommy didn't struggle as Wilbur led him down the front lawn and into the chauffeured car waiting for them.

Once they were inside the car, Wilbur kept his hand over Tommy's eyes.

"Techno told me I need to wait until we're far enough away from our house to let you see where we're going," Wilbur explained, the apology evident in his tone.

Tommy huffed, focusing on the twists and turns the car took and struggling to find any sort of pattern in them. "Fine. Your hand is sweaty as fuck though."

Wilbur made an offended noise. "My hand isn't sweaty!"

"It is too! It's really fucking clammy against my eyes, man," Tommy said, flashing a shit-eating grin in the direction he could only guess Wilbur was in. "Maybe you got sweaty palms syndrome or something gross like that. You should get that checked out."

"Oh fuck you, I do not have sweaty hands," Wilbur argued.

"Sure you don't. I bet that's why you don't get any ladies. You try to hold their hand and they get all grossed out because it's clammy as fuck."

Wilbur sighed, and suddenly Tommy's head was lightly slammed against the back of the seat.

"What the fuck?!" Tommy yelped as the hand dropped from his eyes.

"You were being a gremlin," Wilbur scolded.

Now that he could see, Tommy noticed they were in a rather expensive looking, but ultimately plain car. The seats were black leather, and there was a screen sitting between them and the driver so Tommy couldn't see the chauffeur. He could see out the passenger windows though, and noticed they were driving through what looked like Prime Heights—unsurprising, since that's where Las Nevadas was.

"I have a head injury. You shouldn't be slamming my head into shit like that," Tommy argued, even though it hadn't hurt at all.

Snorting, Wilbur rolled his eyes. "Ah yes, because I definitely aggravated your head injury by doing that. I bet I'll aggravate your head injury if I do this too."

Suddenly, Wilbur leaned forward and there was a sharp sting as he flicked Tommy's forehead.

"You're such a bitch!" Tommy shrieked, smacking Wilbur's hand away. Wilbur laughed and Tommy reached over, slapping his arm as hard as he could in retaliation.

"Ouch! What the fuck!"

"That's what you get for being an asshole," Tommy said.

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. Then, he reached over and slapped Tommy's shoulder, a silent challenge written across his face.

Oh, it was on.

Lurching forward and ignoring the seatbelt trying to yank him back, Tommy started a flurry of slaps on Wilbur's arms and head. Wilbur cursed and started smacking him back, and the two were basically trying to have some kind of a slapping wrestling match mix in the backseat of this fancy car.

At one point, Wilbur managed to twist Tommy into a headlock, and he shrieked so loud he was wondering how the hell the driver was ignoring them. But finally the fight seemed to end when Tommy managed to land a solid bitch slap on Wilbur, sending his glasses flying off his face and onto the floor.

"Don't break my fucking glasses!" Wilbur yelped, ducking down to grab them.

"Then don't put me in a headlock," Tommy shot back, slumping against his own seat.

For some reason, despite the fact that he'd technically just gotten into a fight with Orpheus, there was no lingering fear or anxiety as he settled back onto his own side of the car. Instead, he was struggling not to smile, and Wilbur looked like he was having a hard time holding back his own grin as well.

The car slowed to a stop. Wilbur tensed and unbuckled his seatbelt, with Tommy doing the same. Outside the window, he could see the front doors of Las Nevadas, looking no different from the time he'd gone here with Dream, Hellion, and Cordyceps.

God. That felt so long ago now. In all honesty, Tommy wasn't sure how long it had been since he was taken by the Syndicate. While a part of him wanted to say it felt like six months had passed since he saw Dream, he also knew that there was no way more than two months had gone by since that night at the docks.

The car door swung open without Tommy touching it. A valet waited for him to step out, and Tommy noticed Wilbur climbing out on the other side of the car.

Once they were out, Wilbur threw an arm over his shoulders, tugging him close as they hurried into the casino itself. Unlike before when he'd had to wait outside with Dream while guards surrounded them, no one spared them a second glance as the two walked through the glass doors.

Tommy knew it was because this wasn't Lucid and Orpheus waltzing into Las Nevadas. Neither one was wearing their masks, so to the outside eye, they just looked like two normal guys walking into a casino.

Well, maybe it was a little unusual to see Tommy walking into a casino considering he definitely wasn't old enough to gamble. But still, none of the guards seemed suspicious of him, so he'd take that as a win.

The casino was just as grand as Tommy remembered it. Cigarette smoke hung heavily in the air, and excited voices ebbed and flowed together like the tides of an ocean. The gamblers didn't pay them any mind as they pushed through the casino floor, the twinkling lights and glittering dresses making Tommy's head spin the more he tried to focus on it all.

Wilbur walked them up to the same staff door Fides had led him down with Dream before. He knocked three times, before stepping back, ignoring the questioning look Tommy was giving him.

The door swung open.

"Seshat," Wilbur greeted, dipping his head at the figure holding the door.

"Hey Wil!" The guy holding open the door—Seshat, apparently—was a broad-shouldered man with a shimmering golden veil covering the lower half of his face. His eyes were a bright shade of emerald green, and even though his mouth was covered, Tommy had a feeling he was smiling at them both. "You're right on time for your appointment, so come on in."

Wilbur walked through the opened door, with Tommy following close behind. Seshat let the door fall shut behind them, and they were back in that plain, white hallway he'd had to walk through with Dream, Hellion, and Cordyceps before.

"Wilbur my man!" Seshat said as soon as the door was closed, holding out a hand for Wilbur to shake.

Taking the offered hand, Wilbur beamed as he shook it. "It's been way too long. You're finally back from that scouting trip Q had you on?"

Seshat nodded. "Yup, sure am. It was hot as hell in the desert, but me and Er- well, we're on duty so I gotta call them Thoth, but me and Thoth had a great time down there." Then, before Tommy could ask who Thoth was, Seshat was looking at him, his emerald eyes crinkling up at the corners with an obvious smile. "Tommy! You're so quiet, I almost forgot you were here. What's up, dude?"

Tommy blinked at Seshat, unsure of what to say. Did he know this guy?

When Tommy didn't respond, Seshat's smile faded. "Uh, you okay? Wil, did he lose his voice? I've never heard him be quiet for this long and it's freaking me out a bit."

Wilbur winced, and Tommy realized Seshat must not know about his amnesia.

"Uh, yeah, about that," Wilbur cut in, grabbing Seshat's shoulder to guide him away from Tommy. "Some stuff has happened while you were gone and it might be better to just wait for Q to give you the rundown—"

"Holy shit, it's Wilbur Soot in the flesh," another deep voice cut in.

Whipping his head around, Tommy saw a new figure walking down the hallway towards their small group. This new person was probably the same height as Seshat, but they were wearing tall boots that made them even taller than Wilbur. Dark, curly hair fell down to their shoulders, and an intricate gold mask covered the entire upper half of their face—eyes and all.

"Thoth! It's so good to see you!" Wilbur said, walking over to meet Thoth halfway. The two hugged briefly, both grinning widely at each other, and Tommy couldn't remember the last time he felt like such an outsider.

"It's great to see you too, Wilbur. I know you're here on business, but I had to stop by to say hi." After stepping away from Wilbur, Thoth's head turned in Tommy's direction, and he shrunk back when that eyeless mask landed on him.

"Oh, Tommy's here. I wasn't expecting that given his condition," Thoth said, lips twisting into a frown.

"Wait, what condition?" Seshat asked, looking just as confused as Tommy felt.

"Tommy is, uh, recovering at the moment. He's still not a hundred percent, but I wanted him to get a chance to get out of the house," Wilbur quickly explained, rushing back over to loop his arm through Tommy's.

"Do you have your memories back?" Thoth asked, tilting their head to the side as they stared at Tommy.

Tommy stiffened, and Wilbur tugged him more into his side as Seshat's brows furrowed.

"Memories? Can someone please explain what I'm missing here?"

Sighing, Thoth brushed a strand of hair away from their face. “You know how you slept in this morning and didn’t show up to that meeting we were supposed to have with Dionysus? To catch us up on what we’d missed while we were out of town?”

Seshat blinked. “Oh, uh, that? Ha, yeah, um, I didn’t think-”

“For fuck’s sake, I have amnesia!” Tommy cut in, sick of hearing these strangers talk about him like he wasn’t even there. “I don’t know who the hell either of you are!”

Silence fell over Thoth and Seshat. Despite the mask covering Thoth’s eyes, Tommy could tell they weren’t surprised by the outburst. Seshat meanwhile looked like his own eyes were about to bulge out of his head.

“Wh- You have *amnesia*? ”

“Yes, I do. Don’t remember shit from the past year.”

“There are so many ways this could’ve gone better,” Wilbur muttered under his breath, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“But I don’t understand, how did you get amnesia? Did you hit your head or-”

“Seshat,” Thoth cut in, placing a hand on Seshat’s arm. “I can explain things to you later. We need to take them to their meeting with Dionysus.”

Although Seshat seemed like he wanted to argue, Thoth’s insistence seemed to strike something in him. Huffing, Seshat turned around, gesturing for Wilbur and Tommy to follow him. “Alright, but I’m holding you to that, Thoth.”

Thoth followed right beside Seshat, their heels clicking against the tile floor. “Don’t worry, I promise I’ll tell you everything Dionysus told me.”

They passed by the room Tommy had been forced to give his weapons up in the last time he was there. He waited for Seshat and Thoth to stop, to tell them both to go in the room and make sure they weren’t carrying any weapons on them. But to Tommy’s surprise, they strolled right on by, and Tommy realized that there was no reason for them to be suspicious of Wilbur or Tommy. Las Nevadas was allied with the Syndicate. Wilbur was a member of the Syndicate, and Tommy was... well, he wasn’t a threat.

The group kept walking. They got to the much nicer hallway with the rich green walls and the polished wood floors, passing down the twists and turns until they finally got to the heavy oak doors.

Thoth knocked three times. There was the familiar, “come in!” and Thoth gestured for Wilbur and Tommy to follow them inside.

The inside of the office was exactly the same as it had been before. Walls lined with expensive paintings, a courtyard visible from the window behind Dionysus’ desk, plush chairs dotted over ornate rugs—the picture of casual wealth and luxury.

Dionysus was sitting behind his desk, feet propped up on the wood and mask still covering only half of his face. The scar was almost worse than Tommy remembered, and he tried to resist the urge to shrink in on himself as Wilbur guided him to sit down in the chairs right in front of the desk.

He hated being in here without his mask on. It made him feel vulnerable, knowing Dionysus could see every expression that flickered over his face. The last time he was here, he'd been Lucid. Mysterious, unknowable, and a hero. Now he was just Tommy. Tommy who felt more helpless here than he'd been in a long time.

"Wilbur, always a pleasure to see you," Dionysus grinned, moving his feet off the desk so he could sit straight up.

Behind them, Tommy heard the door shut, and he noticed that Thoth and Seshat had left the room. Now it was just him, Wilbur, and Dionysus.

"Pleasure to see you too, Big Q," Wilbur said, readjusting in his chair until he was half draped across it in a way that almost reminded Tommy of a cat.

Before Tommy could think about Wilbur's similarities to a cat for too long though, Dionysus' good eye snapped to focus on him.

"Tommy, it's been way too long, man," Dionysus said, standing up and reaching his hand across the desk.

Shoving down the anxiety buzzing in his chest, Tommy stood up and shook Dionysus' offered hand.

"It hasn't really been that long though, has it?" Dionysus then said, gripping Tommy's hand with just a little more force than he expected. "You were here only a little while ago, *Lucid*."

Tommy flinched back with a force that surprised even him. He yanked his hand out of Dionysus', heart pounding in his ears at hearing someone call him by his hero name again. Even though he knew that the Syndicate had probably told Las Nevadas that he was Lucid, it was still jarring to be faced with that fact head on.

Dionysus seemed startled by his knee jerk reaction, holding his hands up in mock surrender as he slowly settled back into his chair. "I didn't mean any harm by that. Just joking around."

"Don't call me that," Tommy hissed, unsure of why it felt like there was an iron band wrapped around his chest.

A warm hand settled on his shoulder, and Tommy glanced over to see Wilbur giving him a worried look. He shrugged the hand off, not in a harsh way like he would've done a few weeks before, but in a way that was him trying to silently reassure Wilbur that he was fine.

Wilbur didn't seem convinced, but he dropped the hand and settled back into his seat. Tommy did the same.

"I won't call you that again," Dionysus agreed, smiling like that tense moment had never happened. "Okay, so I did what I could as per your request, Wilbur, but I gotta admit, there wasn't a ton I could find on what's going on inside the Hero Tower."

Tommy immediately stiffened as soon as the words 'Hero Tower' left Dionysus' mouth. His eyes went wide, head snapping to Wilbur, but Wilbur kept his gaze carefully trained on Dionysus.

"Tell me what you *did* find out," Wilbur said, folding his hands under his chin.

"Well, you know how Dream told the media that Lucid is on an extended leave to recover from an injury?" Dionysus began, and Tommy winced hearing that Dream had so quickly covered up his kidnapping. It made sense, of course. They wouldn't want the public to know a hero had been kidnapped by the Syndicate and had no way of being found. But it still hurt to hear that in the city's eyes, Tommy was just... not doing his duties.

Wilbur nodded, and Dionysus continued.

"Inside the Hero Tower, they obviously know Lucid got kidnapped. But Dream's not telling anyone shit about what went down at the docks. He claims he just got knocked out, and when he woke up you all were gone," Dionysus explained, folding his hands in front of him.

Yeah, Tommy shouldn't have been surprised. Dream wasn't going to want to admit to the Committee that Lucid had been the thing the Syndicate was looking for that entire time, but he couldn't tell them about the original trade proposal either, because only he knew it was a moot point. The only way for him to pull that off was for him to just pretend he'd been knocked out the entire time, and Lucid had just disappeared into thin air.

Still, Tommy curled his hands into a fist and dug his nails into his palm.

"He also came to me recently asking if I had any information on where Lucid was being held," Dionysus continued as casually as if he was talking about the weather.

Both Tommy and Wilbur straightened up at this.

"He came here?" Tommy asked, his voice cracking for some reason he couldn't name.

"What did you tell him?" Wilbur asked at the same time.

Dionysus huffed at the two of them, holding his hands up again in a show of surrender. "Relax, both of you. I told him I didn't know shit and that kidnapping isn't really my kind of business." Then, he paused, and his hands dropped back down to the table. "He did ask me something else though, and it was information I didn't really have an excuse not to give him."

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. "What is it?"

Reaching into his pocket, Dionysus took out a poker chip and started fiddling with it absentmindedly. "He asked if I had contacts to hire hunters. Now, he knows damn well I know where to find hunters, hence why I couldn't lie my way out of that."

Hunters. A shudder ran down Tommy's spine at the title.

Although Tommy didn't know much about the hunters, he knew a few things. He knew they straddled the grey area between heroes and villains. He knew they only did their jobs for money—no morality, no message they wanted to send. Hunters were essentially glorified mercenaries. They were skilled in combat and were specialists in finding people and 'hunting' them down.

What a hunter specifically did depended on the individual. Sometimes a hunter might just track down people who owed money to the mob and drag them back to the debt collectors, no fuss no muss type of deal. Sometimes a hunter could function as a stalker for hire, watching specific people and reporting their movements to whoever was paying them. Or sometimes, a hunter was no more than a hired hitman. These types of hunters were few and far between, murdering people not even for their own motivations, but for a wad of cash they could shove in their pockets.

In a way, Tommy thought those types of hunters were even worse than villains like the Syndicate.

"Why the fuck would he want to hire hunters?" Wilbur asked, his shoulders tense.

Dionysus raised an eyebrow. "Why do you think, dipshit? He wants to track down where you guys took Tommy."

And that-

Tommy should've been happy to hear that. He should've been relieved, knowing that Dream was searching for him. That Dream was trying to find him by any means necessary.

But instead, Tommy felt like a bucket of cold water had been dumped over his head. Nausea rose in the back of his throat, and he pressed his nails harder into his palm.

"Do you know who he contacted?" Wilbur pushed.

Dionysus shook his head. "I just gave him the general contact information for the forums themselves. I don't know who's in town and who's not, so it's up to him to find someone to hire."

Wilbur cursed softly under his breath, dragging a hand through his hair and shaking his head. There was a moment of silence as Wilbur twisted his fingers around the brown curls, before he took a deep breath and straightened back up.

"Shit, okay, that's good to know," he muttered, blinking a few times. "Did you find out anything else?"

"Well, as far as the Committee knows, Lucid was taken for no good reason. Along with that, Dream is refusing to talk to literally any other hero in the building at this point besides Cordyceps," Dionysus explained, flipping his poker chip in the air and catching it in the palm of his hand.

Tommy frowned. “Not even Hellion?” He cut in.

While Wilbur seemed surprised by his interruption, Dionysus didn’t blink twice. “Nope, not even Hellion.”

That... That was strange. Not really the part about Dream not talking to the other heroes. That made sense, because he definitely still hadn’t told any of the other heroes about Lucid’s situation (save for Cordyceps apparently). But what was strange was that this kind of personal information about the Hero Tower—the knowledge that Dream wasn’t talking to any of the other heroes—wasn’t something you could find out unless you had a mole on the inside.

Tommy thought back to that night on the docks. How they had been ambushed.

“Who’s your mole?” Tommy asked suddenly, glaring at Dionysus.

Dionysus blinked. “My mole?”

“In the Committee. I know you’ve gotta have someone working for you on the inside.”

A beat passed as Dionysus stared at him, milky eye unblinking. Tommy squirmed under his gaze, but refused to look away.

“Why do you wanna know?” Dionysus finally asked after nearly a full minute of silence.

“Because someone in the Hero Tower tipped the Syndicate off to the Hero’s plan the night I got kidnapped. Whoever that was I’m sure is the same mole you have telling you exactly what Dream is doing inside the Tower,” Tommy explained, flames stoking in his chest again as the anger he’d been mourning the loss of before slowly flickered back to life. “I wanna know who’s betrayed us.”

And to Tommy’s frustration, Dionysus *laughed* at that.

“Damn kid, whatever hero training Dream gave you must’ve really fucked with your head. You never used to be this... righteous,” Dionysus teased, the scar tugging uncomfortably at his lip as he smirked.

Shoving down a wince, Tommy glared at Dionysus. “Tell me who it is.”

There was another beat of silence as Dionysus considered him. Then, he slowly rose to his feet, dropping the poker chip on the desk as he reached for his mask.

“Well, you know what they say, Lucid,” Dionysus began, lifting the mask off his face and setting it down on the desk. “If you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself.”

The other half of Dionysus’ face was unscarred. It was unscarred, and far younger than Tommy would’ve guessed the villain was. But that wasn’t the part that had him frozen in his seat, a black hole forming in the pit of his stomach.

Tommy recognized the unscarred half of Dionysus’ face.

He recognized it because it was *Gamble's* face.

"Wh- I- I don't understand," Tommy whispered, gaping at the mismatched halves of Dionysus and Gamble standing right in front of him. "How- does Gamble have a twin brother or-"

"Tommy," Dionysus- no, Gamble- no, Dionysus said, cutting him off. "I'm a shapeshifter."

And with that, Tommy watched the scar fade away, being replaced with the smooth, completely unmarred face of Gamble Tommy had seen in the cafeteria of the Hero Tower so long ago. Dionysus' short hair grew out so it tumbled around his shoulders, and he gained a few inches of height too, until Dionysus was completely gone, and Gamble was standing in his place.

"You're Gamble," Tommy said, blinking rapidly as he struggled to process what he was seeing.

"I am," Gamble said, grinning as he leaned down to rest his elbows on the desk. "I'm Gamble, and I'm Dionysus, but you can call me Quackity."

Quackity. Gamble. Dionysus.

Dionysus was the same hero who had made Tommy eat lunch when he'd been working out for too long. Gamble was the villain who Dream had sold information to.

Holy shit. Gamble was part of their backup plan that night at the docks.

The mole had been right there in front of his face.

"You- You fucking lied to us!" Tommy yelled, blood rushing in his ears. "You betrayed us!"

"Look, I knew the Syndicate wasn't gonna hurt you. You can be pissed at me if you want, but even before I knew you were Tommy, I wasn't gonna put you in any danger," Dionysus reassured him.

Tommy narrowed his eyes, chest heaving as his mind began to race.

He thought back to his interactions with Gamble. To the way he grinned and joked with him over pizza, to the way he complimented his dedication, to the way he grabbed Tommy and got him out of the way when the building was blown up.

It was then he remembered several other small details he hadn't paid much attention to before.

Dream saying how Hellion, Gamble, and Hourglass were practically attached at the hip. Gamble leaning into Hourglass' side when he threw his arm around him. Gamble joking about how there were a lot of other ways he could get Hellion's germs besides eating his leftovers.

Then, there was that visit to Las Nevadas. When Dionysus had flirted with Hellion, and Hellion had gotten pissed off at him about it.

Tommy folded his arms over his chest. “Do Hourglass and Hellion know?”

That hit the mark.

For the first time in this entire conversation, Dionysus looked taken aback as his smile dropped as he straightened up.

“Don’t bring them up,” Dionysus said, a clear warning in his voice.

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “You’re lying to them then.”

“Tommy-”

“No, you’re lying to Hourglass and Hellion about who you are. They think you’re Gamble, a hero just like them. But you’re actually betraying them *and* the rest of the Committee by feeding all the heroes private information to the Syndicate. Is that right?” Dionysus stiffened, and Tommy stepped closer to the desk. “How much information have you sold over to the Syndicate, *Gamble*? Have you told them Hellion and Hourglass’ identities? I’m sure you know their real names, since the three of you obviously have something going on there. Did you just get close to them so you could have the upper hand on them in case you ever needed it?”

“Shut the fuck up, *Lucid*,” Dionysus snapped. “You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

“I feel like I do though. You lied and got close to Hellion and Hourglass so you could betray them-”

“Hourglass knows!” Dionysus snapped, cutting Tommy off.

...what?

“What- What do you mean he knows? There’s no way he would know and just be okay with that!” Tommy exclaimed. Even though he hadn’t interacted with Hourglass as much as he’d interacted with Hellion, Hourglass didn’t *seem* like the kind of guy who would just be okay with something like that. He was a good person!

But then again, Tommy had thought the same thing about Gamble, and look where he was now.

Sighing, Dionysus dragged a hand down his face, the scar reappearing as he did so. “I told Hourglass once. It was a while ago. I felt like shit because of the lying, and I just had a breakdown and told him, and he wasn’t happy but he didn’t hate me either because of it.” Dropping his hand, his shoulders hunched. “But Hourglass... he has a tendency to forget stuff sometimes. Because of his powers. It messes with his memory, jumping through time like he does. So while I’m not sure, I think he forgot, because he hasn’t brought it up in a really long time.”

Tommy huffed. “So he doesn’t know.”

“But he *did*,” Dionysus hissed. “He knew at one point because I told him, so stop acting like you know shit about why I do what I do. I would never give up private information on Hellion or Hourglass, just like I didn’t tell the Syndicate shit when I started to suspect that Lucid was Tommy fucking Innit!”

And suddenly, Tommy was reminded Wilbur was there too as he stood up next to Tommy. “What do you mean you started to suspect that Lucid was Tommy, Quackity?” His voice was dangerously low, and from the corner of his eye, Tommy could see Wilbur’s form flickering between intangibility and being solid.

Letting out a loud groan, Dionysus huffed as he met Wilbur’s gaze. “Yeah, I started to think that Lucid could’ve been Tommy before you guys grabbed him.”

“When?” Wilbur pushed, narrowing his eyes.

Sighing again, Dionysus dropped his hands onto the desk. “The day I had to practically drag Tommy off a treadmill because he was working himself to the bone, and forced him to eat lunch with me. We talked, and afterwards I started thinking that Lucid could be Tommy.”

Tommy clenched his jaw. “That was less than two weeks after the explosives incident.”

Wilbur made a choked noise. “Two weeks after- Quackity, that was fucking *ages* before we got Tommy back! I had already been telling you for weeks at that point that I thought Lucid could be Tommy, but you, Phil, and Techno didn’t believe me so I thought I was fucking insane!”

“Wilbur, you know how my deal works. I don’t compromise the identities of heroes, and that included Lucid,” Dionysus said, staring Wilbur down.

And now Tommy wasn’t sure what to think. Because he was still pissed at Dionysus for betraying the heroes like that, but at the same time, he’d kept Tommy’s secret for him. He hadn’t ratted to the Syndicate about how Tommy could be Lucid, even though he knew damn well that he was exactly what the Syndicate was looking for.

Burying his face in his hands, Tommy slumped against the desk. There was way too much to process at the moment. He was still reeling over finding out that Gamble was Dionysus, along with the fact that Hourglass apparently had known at some point while Hellion had no idea, and also the whole shit about Dream hiring hunters to track him down—it was so much, and Tommy felt like his head was going to explode.

Suddenly, a knock at the door startled Tommy out of his thoughts.

Tommy, Wilbur, and Dionysus all froze. They shared a startled look, before Dionysus called out, “Who is it?”

“Dionysus, I’m here with those reports you wanted!” Fides’ cheerful voice echoed from the other side.

Wilbur and Dionysus both sighed in relief, while Tommy slumped further against the desk.

“Come on in, Fides,” Dionysus said.

The door opened, and Fides came trotting in, his steps bouncing in that strange, jiggly way they had the last time Tommy had seen him. He was still wearing his full venetian jester mask, but didn’t seem surprised to see Dionysus maskless, and dropped a stack of papers on top of the desk.

Then, once he had set the papers down, he turned to look at Tommy and Wilbur.

“Oh! Hi Orpheus and Asphodel from the Syndicate!”

The words were cheerful, but Tommy’s blood turned to ice as soon as he heard them.

Orpheus and Asphodel.

Asphodel.

Asphodel from the Syndicate.

Tommy’s breathing hitched in his throat. There had been the three names of Syndicate members the heroes had never been able to identify before. Ones who had never been seen, but had been mentioned all the same. Lethe, Styx, and Asphodel.

According to Fides, Tommy had been Asphodel.

No. No, that wasn’t right. It was one thing to have possibly thought of Wilbur, Phil, and Techno as his family but- but to have a literal *name* in the group? That meant Tommy hadn’t just been a civilian who knew who they were. He had been part of the Syndicate. A full-fledged member.

“Asphodel, are you okay?” Fides then asked, leaning close when he noticed how pale Tommy had gotten. “Y’know, it’s been a long time since I’ve seen you. Where did you go?”

Where did you go?

Where did he go? Where did the old Tommy—Asphodel—go? He was the person everyone here seemed to be expecting. He was the one Seshat had been so excited to see. He was the one Fides thought he was talking to right now.

Tommy couldn’t breathe. Was he Lucid or was he Asphodel? The answer should’ve been Lucid, but then he thought back to the way he’d let Orpheus hug him, or Acheron comfort him, or how he’d wanted to call Thanatos dad—that wasn’t Lucid.

“Tommy?” Wilbur said softly, and there was a hand resting on his shoulder. “Are you—”

“Don’t touch me!” Tommy snapped without thinking. His heart was racing in his ears, and he was edging towards the door. He needed to get out of here. He needed to get out of this office

and just get a second to fucking breathe without everyone's eyes weighing on him. He could practically feel the silent question in all of their minds.

Was this the old Tommy or the new Tommy? Was this their Tommy, or the strange Tommy none of them were sure how to act around?

Tommy didn't even know the answer to that one.

So he ran.

Turning on his heel, he sprinted for the doors as fast as he could. He heard Wilbur shout something behind him but ignored it, veering down the hallway without bothering to see which direction he was going.

Tommy's feet pounded against the wood flooring, a constant *thud thud thud* that echoed off the narrow walls of the hallway. He couldn't breathe. It was too cramped in here. The walls were too close. Cigarette smoke still burned his nostrils with every breath he took. It was too much.

His thoughts were spinning wildly out of control. He couldn't be Asphodel, but Fides said he was. He was Lucid, but if he was really still Lucid, why did he let himself get so close to the Syndicate? Why was he calling Wilbur *Wilbur* instead of Orpheus?

Turning down corridors at random, Tommy had no idea how he found himself standing in front of an exit door. This part of the casino was completely foreign to him, with plain walls and a light up 'EXIT' sign blaring red above his head.

This was it. This was his chance to escape.

Tommy wasn't a bad person. But if he really wasn't a bad person, he wouldn't have agreed to being part of the Syndicate. He was no better than the rest of them. Dream would- god, Dream would be fucking disgusted with him if he ever found out.

If he escaped now, what would Dream think of him? Would Dream welcome him back with open arms? Or would he realize who Tommy used to be? Who Tommy still *might* be?

His hand was shaking as he placed it on the door handle.

Then,

"Tommy."

Whipping around, Tommy's heart leapt into his throat when he saw Wilbur standing a few feet behind him.

He didn't look angry. Not like Tommy had thought he would. Instead, he just had his hands shoved into the pockets of his pants, his expression twisted into that horrible, sorrowful thing that made Tommy's chest ache like nothing else.

"I'm sorry if Fides calling you that freaked you out," Wilbur said, his voice wavering a bit. "We wanted you to remember that on your own, but I guess Quackity forgot to tell him about your situation."

Heart racing in his ears, Tommy had to force the words out of his rapidly closing throat.

"I was a member of the Syndicate." It wasn't a question, but Wilbur nodded anyway.

"You were. But you were like Tubbo and Ranboo. You didn't actually participate in anything except for going to meetings sometimes."

Tommy took a breath, losing the battle at trying to calm himself. "Did you- Did you guys force me to join?"

He didn't know why he was asking this. He didn't know why he should bother to believe Wilbur's answer. But he found himself asking anyway.

"No, we didn't. You knew who we were, but I honestly didn't want you to join," Wilbur told him, swallowing a lump down his throat. "I wanted you to stay out of our world. But you begged us to let you join, and Phil and Techno didn't really have any qualms like I did about keeping you out. So we let you in."

Tommy hated how easy it was to believe him, despite how the idea of asking- *begging* to join the Syndicate sounded so foreign to him. It was easy to believe him because of the rage he'd felt in that memory where he talked about burning down the city. It was easy to believe him because Tommy knew that was something the old Tommy would've done.

He stared at Wilbur, and Wilbur stared back. For some reason, Wilbur wasn't making any moves towards him. Wasn't trying to grab him and pull him away from the door. Didn't even look like he wanted to try.

"Why aren't you grabbing me?" Tommy asked.

Wilbur took a shaky breath. "Because I... I can't do this anymore," he admitted, something breaking in his voice. "I can't just sit and watch you have breakdown after breakdown all the time in that tiny goddamn room. You're fucking miserable with us, Tommy. It's not fair to you at all, and I hate seeing you get crushed more and more with every passing day in there."

"Wh- What are you saying?"

Giving Tommy a sad smile, Wilbur held his hands up and took an exaggerated step backwards. "You can go," he said, sniffling a bit. "I won't follow you. Quackity will call Phil and Techno, so they'll show up and start looking for you soon, but you'll get a head start."

Wilbur was letting him go?

Tommy stared at Wilbur in shock, because he was still not making a single move towards Tommy. He was just giving him that sad smile. The one that made him feel like he was being stabbed in the chest.

“Why?” Tommy whispered.

“Because you’re my little brother, and I can’t just watch my brother shrivel up and disappear like you will if things keep going the way they are,” Wilbur told him, blinking tears out of his eyes.

“But... But I’m not your brother,” Tommy pointed out. “I’m not him. I’m not the old Tommy that you loved. I’m a different person than he was.”

Wilbur’s sorrowful expression softened at this. “Tommy, it doesn’t matter how the hell you act. You’re still my brother, even if you don’t remember it.”

Tommy’s breathing hitched, and he dropped his forehead against the door. “Then why would you let me go?”

Wilbur’s answer was simple.

“Because I love you.”

Tears were hot against Tommy’s cheeks now as the cold metal of the door handle burned against his hand. He needed to go. Wilbur was giving him a chance he wouldn’t get again. They were running on limited time before Quackity found them, so he needed to go now before he caught up to the two of them.

Tommy had to go back to Dream. That was what he’d wanted this whole time, right? To go back to Dream, to resume his duties as Lucid, and to go back to the time when things made sense.

But... why did the idea of going back to Dream make him feel sick?

There was no relief when he imagined seeing Dream again, feeling his arms hug Tommy close, listen to him whisper false promises about how he’d protect Tommy to the ends of the earth. Instead, all Tommy could think of was how much warmer Wilbur’s hugs had always felt compared to Dream’s. How achingly familiar it was to plant a garden with Phil, or laugh with Techno, or bury his face in Wilbur’s shoulder.

They were monsters. The Syndicate were monsters, but Tommy had been a monster at some point too. The idea of hurting innocent people still made him feel sick, but also how was he supposed to go back to being a hero knowing he’d once been part of the Syndicate? It wasn’t right. He wouldn’t be able to stomach it.

The Syndicate had killed his brother but... what if they hadn’t?

His hand was still on the door handle. At that moment, Tommy knew he wouldn’t be able to turn it if he tried.

Slowly, he stepped away from the door. His head was bowed and his shoulders were hunched, and he didn’t say a word as he walked back towards Wilbur at the end of the hallway.

Those familiar arms wrapped around him immediately, pulling him close and tucking his head into Wilbur's shoulder. A sob hitched in his throat, and Tommy didn't even have the energy to lift his arms and hug Wilbur back.

Instead, he just stood with his arms at his sides, and face pressed into Wilbur's sweater. Wilbur's shoulders were shaking as he buried his face into Tommy's hair, and a mess of memory fragments floated through his mind in a collage he didn't even try to distinguish between.

"Are you sure?" Wilbur asked softly.

"No," Tommy whispered, shaking his head, "I'm not sure of anything anymore."

And then, Tommy cried. He cried into Wilbur's sweater, and he didn't even know why he was crying at this point. Nothing made sense anymore. He didn't know who he was or what he wanted, let alone who everyone else wanted him to be.

But as Tommy cried, Wilbur started to hum. He swayed back and forth in an attempt to help Tommy calm down, and Tommy found himself recognizing the tune immediately.

It was the song. The song his brother had sung to him. The song that had haunted his dreams with the faceless flashes of brown hair and a hearty laugh.

"Shout at the walls," his brother sang, gently strumming the guitar, "'cause the walls don't fucking love you."

It wasn't a comforting song. The lyrics were achingly sad. But it was familiar.

Tommy could see his brother's face in the memory now.

At the very least, through this whole mess Tommy had gotten back one thing he desperately wanted.

He'd found his way back into his brother's arms.

Chapter End Notes

so first off before we get into it
Seshat - Foolish, Thoth - Eret

anyway a lot just happened! so glad I got to throw in las nevadas again, dionysus/gamble/quackity my beloved little shapeshifter. and I'm very glad I finally got to let eternal duo pop up for a second there! in case you're curious, Seshat is the Egyptian goddess of a lot things *including* architecture and building. Thoth is Seshat's counterpart, and he is the Egyptian god of many things as well including the moon and writing.

we will get more explanation for why Tommy was called Asphodel later, but shoutout to anyone who guessed it! and now we are moving into the next 'phase' of this fic which is going to be focused a lot on Tommy grappling with his identity regarding who he was pre-amnesia vs who he is now, and all the complex morality issues that get thrown in with it.

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! shoutout to my beta Darling as always for being amazing and reassuring me so much after she read through it, she's the best <3

I have a discord server! go check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

There's also a spotify playlist for this fic, so go listen [here](#)

let me know what you thought down in the comments below, I don't respond to most of them but I read them all and they really make my day!

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

brothers?

Chapter Summary

Tommy is more confused than ever.

Chapter Notes

hello hello my beloveds I have returned!

sorry this update took a little longer than usual, I've been working on another fic relentlessly (I'm finally almost done with it so keep an eye out on my ao3 for that) so I put off updating this one, but here we are with another chapter! as always ty guys so much for all the love, it makes me so happy to see how many of you are enjoying this fic just as much as I love writing it

we have some good ol conversations coming up in the wake of the previous chapter so hope you guys enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy felt like he was being torn into two pieces.

He laid on his bed, replaying what happened at Las Nevadas on loop, over and over again in his mind while staring blankly at the ceiling. From a logical standpoint, there was no reason Tommy shouldn't have walked out that door. Wilbur was letting him go. He was giving Tommy the out he had desperately wanted ever since he'd woken up tied up in this room with Orpheus watching over him.

But Tommy hadn't been able to push the damn door open. Tommy had stood there, tears flowing down his face as Wilbur explained why he was letting him go. How it was because Tommy was still his brother, despite the fact that in his eyes, Tommy barely knew him.

Wilbur didn't even *know* that Tommy remembered him. And yet, he loved him enough to let him go.

Tommy hadn't even taken the opportunity handed to him on a golden platter. He wished he could say he regretted it. But he couldn't.

Wilbur was his brother. Tommy remembered this now. All those flashes of dark hair and a warm singing voice were Wilbur, and it was so fucking obvious in retrospect. Dream had told

Tommy that if his brother wasn't dead, then he clearly didn't care about Tommy because he wasn't looking for him.

His brother had been looking for him the entire goddamn time. Tommy just hadn't been able to see it.

Now that he knew Wilbur was the ghost of the brother who had haunted his dreams, now that he knew he had once been known as Asphodel to the Syndicate, now that he knew he hadn't been a kidnapping victim but was actually *one of them*—where did that leave him?

There were still a lot of gaps in Tommy's memories, more void than actual images. He had flashes of Wilbur, flashes of Tubbo and Ranboo, flashes of his own rage towards the world that sat outside his doors. But there was still so much he was missing, so many puzzle pieces that sat just outside of his reach.

A part of Tommy wanted these answers. He wanted to try and make sense of *why* he had joined the Syndicate. Why he had just been okay with all the things they did. Why he was a mon-

No. Tommy didn't want to describe himself as a monster, because then he'd be describing Wilbur as one too. The part of himself that was still a hero—the Lucid side of his brain—told him that was accurate. Because Wilbur was Orpheus, and Orpheus was a monster.

The other part of his brain—the Asphodel side he'd call it—didn't want to call his brother that. Didn't want to call anyone in the Syndicate that really, but especially not Wilbur. It was wrong. It left a bad taste in his mouth, and made him feel vaguely sick.

He'd avoid the word for now. Until he got a better idea of how he felt about it.

Tommy had a lot on the 'to figure out' list, he was starting to realize.

As he sat splayed across the bed, staring up at the plain white ceiling and letting flashes of memory dance across his eyes, he heard the door to his room open. Wilbur hadn't bothered to lock it when they'd gotten back from Las Nevadas the night before. Said that Tommy didn't need to be locked in anymore, and Tommy couldn't even find it in himself to be happy about it.

A part of him even wanted Wilbur to keep locking the doors, because at least then he had a reason to justify why he was staying there. If he was locked in, then obviously he couldn't leave. But with nothing locked, Tommy's excuses to himself ran out.

Tommy didn't bother to look up at whoever entered his room. He figured it was probably Wilbur, and waited to hear him say something as the mattress dipped with the weight of someone sitting next to him.

Instead of Wilbur's voice though, he heard another.

"You doing alright, mate?" Thanatos asked softly.

Tommy winced. Why did it have to be him?

He didn't bother replying. His eyes stayed focused on the ceiling.

"Wil obviously told us what happened at Las Nevadas yesterday," Thanatos told him, "I have to admit, I'm surprised you made the choice you did."

Yeah, Tommy was too.

"Can I ask why?" Thanatos continued, the mattress dipping again as he shifted closer. "Why you didn't leave?"

It was easy to hear the underlying question in his words.

Do you remember us yet? Is that why you didn't leave?

"I don't know," Tommy whispered, twisting his fingers into the soft blankets under his back. "I just... I couldn't."

Thanatos hummed, and Tommy felt a wing brush against the side of his leg. "Wilbur said that Fides had just called you Asphodel before you ran out of Dionysus' office. Did that have anything to do with it?"

Tommy clenched his jaw at the name. He hated the way that other part of him jerked in recognition. The way he still somehow recognized it as *his*, even though the boy who'd worn that title felt like a complete stranger to him.

"I'm not happy to find out I was in the Syndicate," Tommy said, deflating when he couldn't even put the tiniest bit of heat behind his words. There was nothing to be angry about anymore. He just felt... defeated. "It goes against everything I thought I was."

"But you still don't have your memories," Thanatos pointed out, and Tommy had to suppress a flinch at the lie. "Maybe once you get them back, things will make more sense."

"I don't think that'll happen," Tommy admitted, a lump forming in his throat. "I think it's just gonna make everything so much more confusing."

Thanatos was silent for a moment. Then, Tommy felt a cool hand rest on his ankle.

"Then we'll be here to help you figure it all out until you're not confused anymore."

He should've stiffened. He should've felt his heart leap into his throat with fear. He should've flashed back to that day at the docks, when Thanatos had pressed a hand to his shoulder and threatened his life.

Right now, Thanatos could kill him. But for some reason, Tommy wasn't afraid at all.

"What if I never figure it out?" Tommy whispered, squeezing his eyes shut. "What if I never stop being confused?"

"You'll figure it out," Thanatos told him, without the slightest bit of hesitation or uncertainty creeping into his tone. "It might take time, but you're a teenager. There's a lot to figure out

about yourself at your age.”

Tommy huffed. “I don’t think most teenagers have to deal with fucking amnesia.”

Thanatos snorted. “Fair enough, but I still know you’ll figure it out eventually. We’re in no rush over here.”

Taking a shaky breath, Tommy let Thanatos’ reassurance wash over him. Let it fill up the empty caverns in his chest that rattled with his anxieties, leaning into the familiarity of his voice.

Then, Tommy sat up so he could actually see Thanatos. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, one hand resting on Tommy’s outstretched leg, his wings shifting behind him. He moved his hand off Tommy’s ankle though when he straightened up, and Tommy found himself missing the small, physical reassurance.

Instead of voicing that though, he brought his legs up to his chest. Wrapping his arms around his shins, Tommy rested his chin on top of his knees and met Thanatos’ icy gaze. “You... You said you would be here to help me figure my shit out,” he said, his heart pounding in his ears.

Thanatos nodded. “As long as it takes.”

Shoving down the anxiety clawing at his chest, Tommy forced himself to voice the next part of his question. “But I was-” his breathing hitched, making him pause. “Techno told me that- that I was your-” he didn’t know if he could say the word himself.

Thankfully, Thanatos filled in the blank.

“My son?” He said softly.

Tommy nodded, ignoring the way his heart skipped a beat hearing the man refer to him as that. “What if I’m not- when my memories come back, what if I’m not your-” he cut himself off, taking another breath to steady himself. “What if that’s not who I am anymore?”

The question was both a weight off his shoulders, and something that filled him with dread at the same time. What would happen if he wasn’t the person they wanted him to be? What would they do to him?

Thanatos’ face fell at that, but he didn’t seem upset at Tommy for asking it. Instead, he just stared at him for a moment, before sighing and folding his hands together in his lap.

“If you don’t want to be our family anymore, we’d never force you to,” Thanatos said quietly, staring at his hands. “You let me be your father, and if you change your mind about that, that’s okay too.”

Tommy gulped, unsure if he was feeling relief or sadness at that answer. “Would you... Would you still think of yourself as my dad if that happened?”

There was a moment of silence. Then, Thanatos lifted a hand towards him, reaching for his face like he had that first day Tommy had woken up here and tried to bite him. This time though, he paused, and instead of snapping his teeth, Tommy gave him a small nod of permission.

Phil cupped his cheek, and it felt so agonizingly familiar, it was almost painful as he thought about how much he missed this. Missed these little acts of love.

“You never stop being a parent, Tommy,” Phil said, his voice soft. “As a parent, it’s your job to love your kids no matter what. When I realized I thought of you as my own, I knew that was something that was never going to change.” The hand against his cheek was cool, but not uncomfortably so. It was a blessed balm against the pressure in his head. “So to answer your question, no. I won’t stop thinking of you as my son, but I won’t treat you like it if you don’t want me to.”

Again, that little voice in the back of his mind spoke up as he stared at Phil’s face.

Dad.

And it was strange, because this whole moment of Phil cupping his face was giving Tommy so much déjà vu. It was almost exactly like the night Tommy had called Phil dad for the first time.

Tommy wasn’t startled as the memory came back to him. Like all the others, it just slotted back into place, as if it had always been there.

They were in a bedroom with dark walls, more of those paintings of skulls and flowers that decorated the hallways, and even had a few crystals scattered around on the dresser and nightstand.

Tommy was sitting on the edge of Phil’s bed, head pounding and thoughts fuzzy as Phil pressed his hand against Tommy’s forehead.

“I think you have a fever,” Phil told him, shifting his hand down to Tommy’s neck to feel how hot his skin was there. “You said you puked?”

“I- I didn’t mean to make a mess,” Tommy stammered, heart racing as he tried to read the lines creasing Phil’s forehead. “It’s all in the bathroom but-”

“Shh, it’s okay, I’m not mad,” Phil reassured him, moving his hand from Tommy’s neck to his cheek. His skin was blessedly cool against Tommy’s red hot skin, and in his fever-induced haze he leaned into Phil’s hand without thinking.

He was just so tired. His head hurt, he couldn’t think clearly, and everything in his body ached horribly.

“I-I’m sorry,” Tommy said, having to fight to keep down the tears threatening to well up in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

Phil's eyes widened, and as soon as Tommy realized what had slipped out of his mouth, he was lurching backwards to try and get away from Phil.

"I didn't- shit, I'm sorry da- I mean Phil! I'm sorry, Phil . I won't call you that-"

"Hey, just breathe, Tommy," Phil said, placing both his hands on either side of Tommy's face as he cut him off. "You're okay. I'm not upset."

Sniffling a bit, Tommy struggled to sort through his thoughts with the cotton stuffed in his head. "I won't call you dad again, I'm sorry, that was weird."

"You can call me dad if you want, kiddo," Phil told him, giving him a reassuring smile.

"You don't have to say that to make me feel better," Tommy grumbled.

Sighing, Phil wrapped his arms around Tommy's back and hugged him close, and Tommy immediately pressed his forehead into Phil's shoulder. "I'm not just saying it. I'm certainly not complaining about it, but it's whatever you want to do."

Letting out a low whine, Tommy muttered a quiet, "my head hurts, Dad."

"We'll get you some medicine and you can get some sleep. You'll be right as rain in no time." And with that, Tommy felt Phil press a kiss into his hair, as if he was sealing the promise just like that.

Right now, this moment was both so similar, but so different from that night at the same time. Here he was, feeling like shit, and Phil was comforting him. But that time, the thing making him feel terrible was an easy fix. Some cold medicine knocked him out, and with a bit of bed rest and some water he was back to normal within two days.

Tommy didn't even know what normal was anymore. He didn't feel like himself, but he had no idea how he was supposed to know when he felt like 'himself'. Tommy was a stranger in his own skin. As he stared at Phil, he couldn't help but remember Thanatos standing on that roof, detonator clutched in his hand as he announced that their time was up.

"You killed fifteen people trying to get me back."

There was no flinching from Phil at that. No wince. No flash of guilt across his face. Instead, he just nodded, and brushed his thumb across Tommy's cheek. "I did. Killed more than just those in the building, actually."

Tommy's stomach lurched, but he didn't try to pull away. "Why?"

"We were pretty sure Dream had you or at least knew where you were, and we wanted to force his hand," Phil explained calmly, as if he was talking about the weather.

"Do you regret it?"

"I regret that you had to see that. I regret that you got hurt in our efforts to try and get you back," Phil told him gently. "But I've been doing this villain game for a long time, Tommy.

I've killed too many to let myself have any regrets about it."

The honesty was painful. It clawed its way into Tommy's chest and made the hand on his cheek feel as though it were burning him. But he still refused to move away, because the burning was familiar. It soothed something inside of him he didn't even know was broken. Comforting was probably the best way to describe it.

"This is exactly why I'm so confused," Tommy muttered, shutting his eyes as he pressed his face further into Phil's hand. "You just say things like that so casually, and I should hate you for it. I want to hate you for it, but I don't and it doesn't make any sense."

Phil made a sympathetic noise. "Would you rather I lie? Because even if you don't remember me, I know you. I know you'd rather hear the truth head on instead of running away from it."

Tommy considered it for a moment. How much easier it would be if Phil just lied and said he regretted it. That he'd done it all out of necessity and never wanted to pull something like that again.

But Phil was right. Tommy didn't want those lies. He didn't want the glittering words hiding the truth of the man in front of him.

"No," Tommy admitted. "I don't want you to lie."

Humming, Phil dropped the hand from Tommy's cheek, shifting so his hand was then resting on the back of Tommy's neck. "I didn't lie to you about that, so know I'm not lying to you when I tell you that I never wanted to hurt you. I didn't want to, but I did, and I'm so sorry for that. I just- I want you to be happy again, Tommy. And if you get your memories back and decide you can't be happy with us anymore, that's okay too."

Tommy took a shaky breath and nodded.

"Okay."



When Wilbur came by Tommy's room later that same day he'd talked to Phil, Tommy had once again gone back to staring at the ceiling.

"Hey gremlin," Wilbur said, although his tone was softer than it usually was when he called Tommy that. "What are you up to?"

Tommy didn't bother replying. His chest was still far too tight after his talk with Phil to try and put any of his tangled thoughts into words.

Phil said he just wanted Tommy to be happy again. But he had no idea what would even make him happy at this point. Every memory he'd gotten back so far had just upset him even more than the last. He wanted answers, but was he going to lose who he was now in the process of getting them?

When Tommy didn't say anything to Wilbur, his brows pinched together with worry. He sat down on the bed next to him, pressing a hand to his forehead like he was checking his temperature. "Do you feel okay?"

"M not sick," Tommy mumbled, leaning into Wilbur's hand and squeezing his eyes shut. Now that he remembered that Wilbur was his brother, it was almost painfully easy to let himself slip back into the role of brother to him. With Phil and Techno it was still difficult because he only had bits and pieces of memories of who they once were to him. But once he had unlocked the door for Wilbur, it was like dozens of his memories had just fallen back into place as if they'd never disappeared.

It was so odd though, because some of the memories felt like Tommy's, and some didn't. There was still that distance with so many of them. Like he was watching them through another person's eyes. But almost none of his memories with Wilbur had that same distance ingrained into them. The laughter, the warmth, the love—it was his, there was no doubt about that.

But it was still difficult. Everything was difficult these days.

"What's going on then?" Wilbur asked softly. "You can talk to me, Tommy. Always."

God, he wished he could. He wished he could let everything building up in his chest spill out like a dam that had burst, because he knew Wilbur was willing to take the brunt of it all. To wade through the swirling water of his messy emotions and pull him to the surface.

But Tommy didn't even know how to do that. Every time he tried to explain the mess of his mind even to himself, he found himself grasping at straws for words.

"I want to," Tommy whispered, cracking one eye open to stare up at Wilbur. "But I don't even know what to say. My head is just- it doesn't make sense. Nothing makes sense."

Wilbur frowned at that, moving his hand from Tommy's forehead to brush his hair back from his face. "You would've yelled at me if I tried something like this a week ago," he pointed out as he gently untangled his fingers from Tommy's hair. "If you don't remember anything, what changed?"

Again, Tommy's determination not to tell anyone about his returning memories was biting him in the ass. But if any of them knew his memories were coming back, they would be waiting for *their* Tommy to return. And right now, Tommy had no idea if that Tommy was ever coming back. He didn't want to have to play that role.

~~He didn't want to give them false hope.~~

"I don't know," Tommy said instead. "Just... feelings, I guess."

"Like what?" Wilbur pushed, running his fingers through his hair again.

Sighing, Tommy's eyes dropped from Wilbur's face and flickered back to the ceiling. "It's hard to explain."

"Can you try?" There was a desperation lining Wilbur's voice that Tommy wasn't used to hearing. "I just feel like I don't understand you at all, and I wanna make sure I don't freak you out."

At this point, Tommy wasn't sure if he could be freaked out by Wilbur even if he tried to be. The unfamiliar mental image his mind had painted of Orpheus before was practically erased at this point, instead replaced with memories of Wilbur making him laugh so hard his stomach hurt, spending hours laying on the floor of Wilbur's room listening to him play his guitar, sharing a silent look across a room and immediately knowing what Wilbur was thinking.

Orpheus or not, at one point in time, Wilbur had been *his*. His older brother. His best friend. And a part of Tommy still wanted that to be true.

Maybe it was all of him that wanted that. He really wasn't sure anymore.

"You're familiar," Tommy finally settled for, figuring it was innocuous enough to not be suspicious. "I just... feel that I know you. And I trust you."

You're my brother; sat on the tip of his tongue, but he didn't say it.

Taking a shaky breath, Wilbur nodded. "Okay. That's- Well, that's better than I expected, honestly." He laughed a bit, but it was a weak sound. "Just let me know if I'm being... too much, I guess."

Tommy doubted that would happen. If anything, Tommy was worried about acting too familiar with Wilbur, and him realizing that something was up.

"I'll let you know," was all Tommy said instead.

A moment of silence hung between them. The ball in Tommy's chest felt a bit looser than it had before, and although everything was still so tangled up in his head, having Wilbur here helped distract him from it all.

Suddenly, Wilbur spoke up again. "Do you wanna go downstairs and watch a movie? I feel like you need to get out of this room."

Although Tommy was tempted to say no, because if he left the room it would just be a reminder of how he wasn't technically a prisoner anymore, how he was here of his own free will, he found himself nodding anyway. Because it was Wilbur who asked. And the more he remembered his brother, the harder it was to say no to anything he suggested.

Smiling at him, Wilbur hopped off the bed, and Tommy's stiff limbs groaned in protest as he followed along. They headed down the stairs to the living room, and Tommy noticed it was night outside. He hadn't even been looking at his windows the past few hours, so he wasn't sure what time it was. Not like it mattered though. Time didn't have much meaning when all he did was sit in his room all day.

The two settled on the couch, and before Tommy could even try to use his pouty face on Wilbur, Wilbur chose the movie for them. He picked some movie about aliens coming to Earth and the translator who had to figure out how to communicate with them, and it actually ended up being pretty interesting despite how boring Tommy thought it was going to be.

At some point during the movie, Tommy found himself slumping against Wilbur's shoulder. Wilbur threw an arm around him and they stayed like that for the rest of the film, with Tommy curled into his brother's side, and Wilbur resting his chin on top of his head.

When the movie ended, Tommy glanced up to Wilbur to ask him what he thought, but he paused when he realized Wilbur's eyes were shut. His breathing was slow and even, and the arm around his shoulders had gone lax. Wilbur had fallen asleep.

Glancing out of the corner of his eye, Tommy could feel the front door practically staring at him. It was so close. The living room was dead silent, and from what he could tell, Phil and Techno weren't home.

All it would take were a few small steps. Wilbur seemed to be deep enough in sleep that he wouldn't wake up if Tommy moved. By the time Phil and Techno got home, Tommy could be long gone.

His heart pounded in his ears as he considered it. He had a second chance. He could leave.

Tilting his head up ever so slightly, Tommy noticed how the bags under Wilbur's eyes had gotten better over the past week. His cheeks weren't as sunken in as they once were, and he didn't seem nearly as pale.

There was no sadness in his face as he slept. He just seemed at peace.

Shifting in Wilbur's grip, Tommy readjusted so he was using Wilbur's chest as a pillow. Then, he let his own eyes flutter shut, and it only took a few minutes for him to drift off to sleep.



Not long after the Las Nevadas incident, Tommy stopped bothering with the prepackaged food nonsense.

No one locked the doors anymore. He was left completely unsupervised on multiple occasions. There would be no point in them trying to drug him at this point. Plus, he was really getting tired of gas station sandwiches.

It started one night when Techno brought him his dinner. It was a standard dinner of a plastic-wrapped tuna sandwich and a fruit cup, but Tommy's stomach turned when he saw it. He could smell garlic and butter wafting up from the stairs, and knew the others were probably having something much more enjoyable for dinner.

As Techno set the tray down in front of him, Tommy stared at it for a few beats, trying to shove down the rising nausea in his throat. But when he tried to imagine biting into the

sandwich and winced, he found himself speaking up before Techno could leave the room.

“Wait,” Tommy called out.

Techno paused, his hand on the door. “What’s up?”

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Tommy glanced between the sandwich and Techno a few times. Shit. How was he supposed to ask this when he’d been the one so insistent on eating packaged stuff in the first place?

“Um... what are you guys having for dinner?” Tommy ended up asking, keeping his eyes on his lap.

There was a pause as Techno narrowed his eyes at him. “Nothing too special. Phil just made some pesto pasta.”

Keeping his eyes firmly on the bed, Tommy twisted his fingers into the blanket as he asked, “Can, um, I mean if you don’t have any extra that’s fine, but if you do-”

“Do you want some?” Techno asked, cutting him off.

When he looked up, Techno was staring at him with something like relief washing over his face. There was no judgement, no sense of triumph either. Just... relief.

Tommy nodded. “I’m getting a little tired of these sandwiches.”

Techno huffed. “I’m surprised you lasted this long. Those things suck.” He pulled open the door, pausing before leaving the room. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

He didn’t shut the door behind him as he left. If Tommy wanted, he knew he could walk down the stairs and join him in the kitchen. He wondered if Phil and Wilbur were sitting at the dining room table and eating together. Or maybe they were on the couch, watching a movie or something with their bowls in hand.

Tommy thought about what it would be like to join them. To sit at that dust-covered dining table or squeeze onto the narrow couch, listening to Wilbur, Phil, and Techno all talk about their days. He was sure there’d be a lot of laughter, probably some good-natured teasing and maybe a bit of elbowing from Wilbur.

Whenever they had family dinners at the dining table, Wilbur and Tommy always sat on one side while Phil and Techno sat on the other. Except for the times Wilbur and Tommy started kicking each other under the table, and Phil would make Techno and Wilbur switch places.

One time he could remember Wilbur kicking him so hard in the leg under the table that he spilled his drink, and it ended up falling straight into Wilbur’s lap. Tommy had laughed so hard at that that soda came out of his nose, and Phil had given them both a full lecture about no fighting at the table before making them clean up the mess together.

Could Tommy slip back into that role? Could he ignore the nagging in the back of his mind, the one reminding him of all the terrible things he’s witnessed the family do, and go back to

being the Tommy they wanted?

Was that what he wanted? Did he want this family back?

By the time Techno came back with the food, Tommy was no closer to figuring out the answer to that question. He was carrying a tray, and not only did it have a bowl of pasta, but it also had two pieces of garlic bread on it, and a glass of what Tommy assumed was coke.

“Oh, um, thanks man,” Tommy said, stomach growling at the sight.

“No need to thank me. It’s better for you not to be eating all that packaged stuff anyway,” Techno said, hovering at the edge of the bed like he wasn’t sure what to do with himself now that Tommy had his food.

Normally this was when Techno would leave him to eat. Or sometimes he might stay, if he had something he wanted to talk about with Tommy.

There was an ache in Tommy’s chest from the memory he’d gotten back about the family dinners. Even though he wasn’t sure if he wanted to actually go down and eat with all of them, he didn’t like the idea of just sitting alone in his room, eating in silence either.

After a few seconds of hesitation, Techno turned for the door again.

“Techno,” Tommy said, and Techno immediately froze in place.

“Uh, yeah?”

Poking at his pasta with his fork, Tommy pointedly didn’t look at Techno as he said, “You can, um, you can stay. If you want.”

There was a beat of silence as Techno stared at the door, and Tommy wondered if he’d gone too far. But then, Techno was turning around, and he settled himself in the plush chair next to Tommy’s bed without comment.

Tommy waited for him to say something. Techno was probably waiting for Tommy to say something.

Neither spoke. Tommy ended up digging into his pasta.

It was heavenly to say the least. After weeks of nothing but gas station sandwiches that tasted more like plastic than actual food, having a real, home cooked meal was nothing short of a five star meal for Tommy.

Tommy scarfed down the pasta with surprising fervor. Techno watched him in silence with one eyebrow raised.

“So you’re not worried we’re gonna drug you anymore?” Techno asked when Tommy had almost finished the pasta.

Unsure of how to respond to the question, Tommy shrugged. “There’d be no reason for you to. You already keep all the doors unlocked now anyway.”

“Fair enough,” Techno said, pushing a hand through his hair.

They lapsed into silence again. Tommy moved onto the garlic bread, and the buttery loaf practically melted in his mouth. *Fuck*, he’d missed real food.

“Phil and Wilbur are worried about you,” Techno then told him, breaking Tommy’s focus away from his food. “And honestly, I’m a bit worried too.”

Tommy frowned. “Why are you worried?” He asked after swallowing his current bite of bread, setting the rest down on the plate.

“Because you’ve been acting off lately.”

Blinking once, Tommy’s frown deepened. “What do you mean?”

Techno shrugged. “I dunno, man. You tell me. You’ve been acting all sad and quiet lately and it’s really starting to freak us out.”

Oh. That’s what he meant by acting off.

“I mean… it’s hard,” Tommy said, wrapping his arms around himself. “Trying to deal with all these complicated emotions and shit, not to mention finding out I used to be part of the Syndicate. I’m not exactly having a great time here.”

A second ticked by. And then another. Techno stared at him for a moment, and Tommy squirmed under his gaze.

Then,

“Do you wanna go back to Dream?”

Huh?

“You stopped locking the doors days ago and only now you ask me that?” Tommy questioned.

“There’s a difference between wanting something and actually doing it,” Techno shot back immediately. “Clearly you’re not trying to leave, but I’m asking if you want to go back. If you miss him.”

That… That was something Tommy had struggled to consider.

There was the part of his mind telling him that he *needed* to go back. That he owed it to Dream to get out of this house while he could and go back to being Lucid. Helping Dream just like he was supposed to.

But did he actually *want* to go back? Did he miss Dream?

Tommy missed when things made sense. He missed when he felt like he had a real purpose. He missed when he knew he was doing the right thing.

Did he miss *Dream* though?

Dream had saved him. He had been helpful, teaching Tommy how to fight. He promised Tommy revenge, and also promised to protect him. Tommy had known he was Dream's, but Dream had never been his. There was always some invisible barrier between them. A distance he made sure always separated them, so that Tommy could never actually consider himself close with his mentor.

"I don't know," Tommy confessed, staring at his hands. "I should know the answer to that. I know I should. But I just- I don't."

He waited for Techno's face to light up in some kind of relief or satisfaction. Because this was a triumph for him, wasn't it? Tommy had admitted that he didn't know if he actually missed his mentor. That was supposed to make Techno happy, right? Because it lowered the chance of Tommy actually going back to Dream.

Instead, Techno let out a slow breath through his nose. "You don't *need* to know anything, Tommy. This is your own head you're workin' stuff out in. There's a lot going on up there, so it's okay to say you don't have answers sometimes."

"I feel like that's the only answer I have these days though," Tommy grumbled, wrapping his arms around himself.

There was another pause. It was as if a cloud had descended over the conversation, darkening Tommy's mood and sending him spiraling into his confusion once again. Pushing the tray of food away, he pulled his knees to his chest, and once again was hit with the urge to bury himself under his blankets until his head stopped spinning.

In the past, Techno would've probably left him to do that. Today was different though.

"Okay, we're not going back into the wallowing," Techno suddenly said, reaching out and grabbing Tommy's wrists.

"Wh- Hey! What are you doing?" Tommy yelled as Techno pulled on his arms until he was half off the bed.

"I can practically see a cloud over your head," Techno told him, readjusting his grip onto Tommy's sides. "I'm not leavin' you here to get rained on like that."

Before Tommy could ask what Techno meant by that, he was being lifted into the air, and yelled as Techno slung him over his shoulder like he was a sack of potatoes.

"The fuck are you doing? Put me down!" Tommy yelled, pounding Techno's back with his fists.

"Nope. Don't think so," Techno said, carrying him out of the room without any sign that he was struggling with the added weight.

Tommy squirmed in Techno's grip, but his arms were like iron bars. After a few seconds of fighting, he gave up, slumping over Techno's shoulder so he was staring at the man's back. He jolted a bit as they headed down the stairs, but Tommy didn't bother to lift his head to see where Techno was taking him. It wasn't like he could do anything about it either way.

They got to the bottom of the stairs and Tommy heard another voice.

"Uh, Tech? What are you doing?" Phil asked, and although Tommy couldn't see him from this angle, he guessed he was in the living room.

"Therapy," Techno deadpanned.

Then, before Tommy could call out for Phil to help him, he heard another door open and realized that Techno was taking him down to the training room.

Oh. Well... he wasn't exactly against that.

Techno carried him down the steps to the basement, the lights flickering on and making Tommy wince. Then, all of the breath was knocked out of Tommy as Techno chucked him off, his head spinning as he slammed onto a training mat.

"What the fuck, man?!" Tommy squawked, shaking his head to try and reorient himself.

"Grab a staff," Techno ordered, already pulling his hair back into a ponytail. "We're doing the same rules as last time."

Frowning, Tommy scrambled to his feet and grabbed two of the staffs off the wall. He tossed one to Techno, who caught it barely a second before it hit his face. This time when he shot Tommy a dirty look for the move, Tommy found himself grinning.

While he wasn't sure how this was supposed to help his mood, he hadn't gotten the opportunity to train since the last time Techno had brought him down here. Anticipation was already buzzing in his veins, and Tommy hopped from foot to foot to warm up his muscles as he settled himself across the mat from Techno.

"You ready?" Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

Readjusting the grip on his staff, Tommy nodded. "Sure am, big man."

Techno lunged first. Tommy sidestepped the hit, spinning on his heel to try and slam his staff into Techno's back. However, Techno was fast like he was, and ducked without even glancing behind him.

The sparring quickly turned into a dance. Tommy would dodge, and then Techno would dodge. They both stepped around each other like it was choreographed, falling into each other's rhythm with surprising ease.

The last time they had sparred, Tommy had let his anger flow through his veins and guide his movements. There was no more rage left to spark in him, but that didn't hinder him. If anything, it made him more focused. He grinned as he ducked under a swing from Techno's

staff, he laughed when he landed a hit against Techno's side, and he grunted when Techno got him in the leg.

It was almost like the times he sparred with Dream, but there was no burning desire to try and prove himself to Techno. There was no pressure or anything of the sort. He was just... having fun.

The first round ended when Techno slammed the butt of his staff into Tommy's chest, sending him into the ground. Tommy leapt to his feet almost immediately, ready to go again without so much as a word of prompting from Techno.

The second round ended when Tommy got a lucky hit square into Techno's gut, making him *oof!* like a video game character and sending him to his knees. When Tommy held the tip of his staff under Techno's chin, Tommy realized Techno's smile matched his own.

The third round ended... a little strangely.

They were in their usual dance again. Tommy swung his staff to the right and Techno darted out of the way, before trying to send his staff towards Tommy's ankles. Tommy jumped over the weapon, and Techno stumbled to regain his balance since the force of his own swing knocked him off kilter.

Seeing an opening, Tommy sent the staff to the left, aiming for Techno's shoulder. At the same time, Techno whirled around, aiming for Tommy's opposite shoulder as well.

It seemed like they both misjudged the other's movements though, because Tommy felt something hard slam him in the side of the head at the same time he felt his staff connect with Techno's head.

It was almost comical how they both collapsed like puppets whose strings had been cut. Tommy's vision was spinning as his head throbbed, while Techno groaned and rolled onto his side, holding a hand over the part of his head right above his ear.

"What the fuck, man?" Tommy grumbled, blinking a few times to try and clear his vision.
"Thought you weren't supposed to hit me in the head?"

"I wasn't aiming for your head!" Techno protested, wincing as he pulled himself up on his knees. "Plus, you hit me in the head too, so at least we're even."

God, that had to have been a funny sight. Both of them hitting the other in the head at the same time. It was like something out of a stupid movie.

It reminded Tommy of the only time Techno had tried to train him. Even though Tommy had been aiming for Techno, somehow he miscalculated the force of his own swing, and got caught off guard by his momentum. He ended up smacking himself in the face with the staff hard enough to give himself a bloody nose, and Techno didn't stop laughing at him for a full five minutes.

After that, they had agreed Tommy wasn't much of a fighter. Oh, how things had changed.

With sweat beading on his forehead and pumping blood warming his veins, Tommy couldn't find it in himself to get all twisted up inside about the memory like he usually did. He just felt good right now. A bit tired, but relieved to have gotten some of the tension unspooled in his chest.

The two of them sat on the mat in silence for a few minutes, the only sound between them being their panting breaths.

"Thanks for this, Techno," Tommy finally said after he'd been able to steady his breathing again. "It helped."

Huffing, Techno shot him a small smile back. "No problem, kid. Though I'm a little embarrassed this is the second time I've been bruised up so badly by my litt—" he cut himself off, grin faltering as he stared at Tommy for just a beat too long. "By a seventeen year old," he corrected.

Tommy decided not to focus on what Techno had almost said. Not right now.

Another beat of silence passed between them.

"You've started calling me Techno again," Techno pointed out quietly, staring at his lap.

Clenching his jaw, Tommy nodded. It hadn't been something he thought about. Like so many things these days, it had just been muscle memory kicking in.

"So you know? You weren't just doing it on accident?" Techno pushed, something like hope crinkling in the corners of his eyes.

"It... It wasn't an accident," Tommy said, because while he had nearly called the Syndicate members by their real names on accident before, he'd never slipped up. Even if he hadn't really thought about calling Techno *Techno*, if he had wanted to stop it, he would've.

He silently pleaded with the universe for Techno not to push it further though. He didn't want to struggle to explain when the names Thanatos, Acheron, and Orpheus had begun to feel alien on his tongue. He didn't want to try and explain himself without revealing all the cards he was holding to his chest.

Thankfully for him, Techno seemed to understand this. He hummed once, before using his staff to push himself to his feet. Then, he held out a hand to Tommy to help him up.

A few weeks before, Tommy would've smacked the hand away. He would've scoffed at the idea of accepting help from a Syndicate member. Been disgusted at himself for even considering it.

This time, Tommy put his hand in Techno's, letting the man pull him to his feet. One part of his brain smiled, while the other part snarled in disgust.

Tommy ignored them both, and dropped Techno's hand as soon as he was standing.

"You wanna go again?" Techno asked, taking a step back to the other side of the mat.

"If I win, you have to carry me up to my room again," Tommy suggested, smirking at Techno.

Techno raised an eyebrow. "If I win, you have to be my taste tester for potato bread. I've been messing with the recipe, but Phil and Wil are sick of potato bread at this point."

Tommy snorted. Of all stakes, he wouldn't say those were particularly high ones. "Fine. It's a deal then."

When Techno surged at him again, both of them were smiling wide enough to hurt their cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy is struggling man :(but heyyyy we got sbi bonding

Hope you guys enjoyed!! This chapter was a bit more of a chill chapter after all the drama of the previous few chapters, giving tommy some time to settle in with everything that's gone down. but next chapter more exciting stuff will happen so look forward to that!

I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic or want the opportunity to ask me questions go check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

There's a spotify playlist for this fic too! check it out [here](#)

let me know what you thought down in the comments below, I don't reply to most but I read them all and they really make my day! <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

meeting old friends for the first time

Chapter Summary

Phil wants to bring Tommy somewhere.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone I'm here with another update! and before you worry, no, this is not an april fool's day prank /gen I wouldn't be that mean to post a chapter update that's just a prank lmao

anyway this chapter is... a lot of fun. I had a very fun time writing it and you'll see why once you get into it

hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy sometimes found himself wondering if the Syndicate was batshit insane. Not necessarily in the evil way, but in the *what the actual fuck are they thinking?* type of way.

This was definitely one of those times.

“Why the fuck are you gonna bring me to a Syndicate meeting?!” Tommy yelped, jumping back on his bed and staring wide-eyed at Phil.

Phil, who was leaning against the door to his room, shrugged. “The others miss you and wanna make sure you’re doing alright. Plus, it’s been two weeks since we stopped locking the doors and you haven’t escaped yet, so I don’t see much of a risk with letting you come along. The stuff we’re gonna discuss is mostly about you anyway.”

Tommy blinked, feeling as though he was on one of those prank shows. “Uh, Phil? Just because I’m not trying to escape doesn’t exactly mean I like the Syndicate now.”

“I understand that. But I think you can give us intel into what happened between you and Dream in the early days of your stay with him,” Phil said, casually like he was talking about the weather. “We just want to get a clear picture of what happened after you disappeared.”

Oh.

Oh.

A shudder ran down Tommy's spine at the words. No matter how many flickers of happy memories he got back of Phil, Techno, and Wilbur, they were still the Syndicate. Phil was still Thanatos, and he wanted information on Dream.

It was stupid for Tommy to be surprised by this. He had let his guard down far too much with the Syndicate the past few weeks, and Phil's words were like a slap in the face to remind him of who he was dealing with.

He wished he could be upset, but it... it wasn't the worst thing Phil could ask of him. It wasn't like he was asking Tommy what Dream's secret identity was or for his greatest weaknesses. He just wanted to know what happened after Dream took him in.

The logical part of Tommy's mind immediately protested this, reminding him that he shouldn't be telling Thanatos anything, shouldn't be telling *the Syndicate* anything.

But the illogical part of his mind—the same one that whispered words like *dad* and *family* whenever he was around the others for too long—reassured him it wasn't a big deal. That he could trust them.

He also couldn't deny the curiosity sparking inside of him. Getting to sit in on a Syndicate meeting, seeing exactly who showed up and what they were like when he wasn't trying to fight them, maybe even finding out who the healer Tubbo and Ranboo mentioned was... he wanted to know more. There used to be a fire smoldering in his chest for the Syndicate, a desire to burn the city down for the ones he cared about.

Tommy wanted to know why.

"It's just a meeting, right? Nothing else going on?" Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow at Phil.

"Of course. Trust me, I don't want you getting anywhere near the heroes right now."

Tommy found himself both comforted and disturbed by that statement, and he couldn't decide which feeling was stronger.



"You seriously do this every time you go out as Orpheus?"

It was the night of the Syndicate meeting. Tommy was sitting cross-legged on his bed, holding a small mirror up in front of Wilbur's face as he painted black, glittery makeup under his eyes.

"It hides my eyes better," Wilbur explained, using his fingers to smear the paint over his eyelids. "Since my mask doesn't hide my face as much as Phil and Techno's do, I do this to make sure no one can recognize me as a civilian."

"It makes you look emo."

Pausing mid-smear, Wilbur raised an eyebrow at him, the black makeup trailing below his eyes like glittery tears. "Fuck off, child. It's not emo, it's called having a secret identity."

"You keep telling yourself that, bud," Tommy huffed, and Wilbur flipped him off with a black-stained finger before resuming applying the eye makeup.

While Wilbur could probably go do this in his own room, for some reason he had insisted on having Tommy hold the mirror for him. He was pretty sure that Wilbur was just being clingy because he'd been a bit busy the past few days, but he wasn't going to call him out on it.

Not to mention, Tommy was relieved to have Wilbur to distract him. Already his stomach was tying itself into knots as the minutes passed on, the knowledge that he was going to meet the entire Syndicate in less than an hour hanging over his head like a guillotine.

It wasn't his safety he was worried about. No, Tommy knew Phil, Techno, and Wilbur wouldn't let him get hurt. Rather, he was terrified about what memories the Syndicate meeting might trigger. How much of his mind would belong to Asphodel versus Lucid after tonight.

Fuck. It was the most frustrating thing in the world, both wanting his memories to return but not wanting them back at the same time. The few memories he'd already gotten back had changed him so much, and while a part of him was grateful because he'd found his brother again, it also made him feel like a different person than he'd been just a few months earlier.

What would happen to the Tommy he was now when he got all of his memories back? Who would he be?

Tommy wanted the answers, but he didn't want to be someone else. He wanted to stay himself, but he didn't even know who that was anymore.

So lost in thought, Tommy didn't even realize his hands were shaking until he felt warm hands gently push his arms down, lowering the compact mirror until it was face down on the blankets.

"Tommy? You okay?"

Blinking, Tommy realized Wilbur had probably said his name several times at that point, and he was only just now hearing him.

"Shit, I'm sorry," Tommy muttered, fingers clutching onto the cool metal of the compact mirror. "I, uh, zoned out for a second."

Wilbur's brows furrowed. "Are you nervous about tonight?"

Dammit. Was he that obvious?

"Kind of," he admitted, dropping his gaze to his lap. He flipped the mirror over in his hands, meeting the reflection of his own eyes, and wondered if they'd always looked like such a washed-out shade of blue.

"You don't need to be nervous," Wilbur reassured him. "No one is going to hurt you. I swear, you don't have to be afraid of anyone from the Syndicate, and if for some reason someone decides to be an idiot, we'll take care of them."

Sighing, Tommy shook his head. “I know. I’m not worried about that.”

“You’re not?” Wilbur’s frown deepened.

Well shit. Now he needed an explanation for why he was nervous without bringing up his memories.

“I... I’m worried we might be seen,” Tommy came up with after a few beats of silence. “If Dream’s hired hunters and one of them sees that I’m with you guys and not trying to run away, he might, I dunno, tell the whole city Lucid is a villain now or some shit.”

It wasn’t a complete lie. Tommy *was* worried about Dream realizing that Tommy could’ve escaped a long time ago, but hadn’t bothered to do so yet. If he knew that, he would be so disappointed in Tommy. And then he would be pissed. Pissed because in his mind, Tommy not escaping would’ve meant he switched sides.

Tommy knew how Dream’s mind worked. Everyone was either on the good side or the bad side. There was no room for sympathy or confusion when it came to all the lives that hung in the balance of the hero and villain fights.

Maybe that’s how Tommy should be thinking, but he couldn’t. Not anymore.

“Oh Tommy, you don’t need to worry about that,” Wilbur reassured him, the frown disappearing off his face like someone had wiped it away with an eraser. “Even though we all know each other’s civilian identities, when we’re having meetings, we always wear our masks. That included you, when you used to go to these.”

Huh?

“Wait, I had a mask?”

Wilbur nodded, already climbing off the bed. “Yeah, of course you do. Just like how you had a code name, we didn’t want to risk your face being seen when we all traveled to meetings together. Here, let me grab it. I know just where it is.”

And before Tommy could ask anymore questions, Wilbur was running out of the room, leaving Tommy alone on his bed.

His eyes drifted back to the mirror in his hands. He met his washed-out gaze again, brows scrunching together as he tugged down the corner of his eye with a free finger and watched the way the reflection did the same.

It wasn’t even two minutes before Wilbur was rushing back in the room. He hopped onto the edge of the bed, holding the mask out like some sort of prize, and Tommy carefully set the mirror down to look it over.

The mask was larger than he expected. It was stylized like a deer skull, looking as though it covered the upper half of his face but leaving his mouth visible. In a way, it was eerily similar to Techno’s boar skull, but unlike Techno’s, the deer skull was covered in... plants?

Fake flowers and moss were patched onto the bone, making the mask look as though it was being reclaimed by nature in front of his very eyes. The moss trailed up the side of the skull, wrapping around the base of the antlers and climbing up them like tendrils of ivy. The flowers on top of the moss were small, white, and with each petal having a thin line running down the center.

Asphodel flowers. Tommy didn't remember ever seeing those types of flowers before, but he recognized them all the same.

Tommy didn't feel in control of his limbs as he slipped the mask on over his face. He was a puppet, his limbs pulled this way and that by strings attached to the void in his mind. It was muscle memory that made him put on the mask. But he was the one who lifted up the mirror to see the unfamiliar reflection staring back at him.

Except... it wasn't unfamiliar.

He remembered seeing his wide blue eyes staring back at him from behind the holes in the deer skull before. Standing in front of a bathroom mirror, excitement making him bounce on his toes as Techno called to him from downstairs, telling him it was time for them to go.

"I'm Asphodel," he whispered to his own reflection, his heart jolting hearing his code name said aloud. With the deer skull on, Tommy thought he actually looked pretty damn intimidating. Asphodel, fitting right in with Orpheus, Acheron, and Thanatos.

Bile rose in his throat the longer he stared into the old Tommy's eyes.

This was Asphodel. The person he was supposed to be.

But Tommy didn't feel like he was looking at himself with the mask on. The longer he met his own reflection, the more he noticed a familiar anger flickering behind his pale eyes. Not the anger he'd felt as Lucid, but the anger he'd felt as Asphodel. The rage that burned slow and steady in his chest like a flame that was constantly fed, biding its time and waiting for the right moment to surge.

Hatred for an unfair world. A desire to feed the flames and let them consume the city that had fucked him over time after time after time as a kid. To walk through the ashes with his family by his side, laughing at the destruction he had caused.

Breath catching in his throat, Tommy yanked the mask off his head as fast as he could, chucking it across the room and squeezing his eyes shut as he tried to wipe that mental image from his mind. That wasn't him. That couldn't be him.

Tommy didn't want to destroy the city and laugh among the ashes. He wanted to protect it. To keep others from feeling the same pain of injustice he'd felt so many times growing up.

But... at the same time, he could feel the anger sitting behind his heart. The flames had died down, but they weren't dead completely. There were still low-burning coals, just waiting to be stoked with a poker so they could be set ablaze once again.

Two different fires. Two different directions for his anger to go.

“Tommy?”

Wilbur’s soft voice startled Tommy out of his own head, and he realized he was hyperventilating as soon as he looked up. His chest ached, and his hands shook violently where they had twisted into his sweatshirt.

“I- I don’t want to wear that mask,” Tommy stammered, not even turning to see where it landed when he threw it. “Is there anything else I can wear?”

There was a moment where Wilbur opened his mouth as if to ask Tommy why the mask had upset him so much, but something in Tommy’s face must’ve made him decide against it, because he quickly shut it again.

A beat passed as he furrowed his brows, glancing away from Tommy as he thought it over.

“I might have something,” he said. Then, he got off the bed again, and disappeared down the hall for the second time in ten minutes.

Bringing his knees to his chest, Tommy took a few deep breaths to calm his racing heart. He pointedly didn’t look in the direction he’d thrown the mask, instead focusing on wringing his hands together and listening to the sound of Wilbur’s footsteps shuffling in the distance.

When Wilbur came back again, he was much less excited than he’d been when he first delivered Tommy’s old mask.

“Here, this was an old one of mine that I used before I found my current one,” Wilbur told him.

The new mask was a masquerade mask similar to Wilbur’s current one, but the edges fanned out like dark blue wings lined with gold that shimmered in the dull light of Tommy’s bedside lamp. There were four different wing tips that fanned out down around the cheekbones, with the main mask itself covering the eyes like a typical masquerade mask.

When Tommy put this one on and looked in the mirror, he was relieved when no memories were triggered. But his eyes were still the same washed-out shade of blue, and something about them made his chest clench.

“I see what you mean about your eyes,” Tommy said, laughing weakly.

His voice cracked as he said that. It was all just... too raw.

Wilbur seemed to notice this, because he was quiet for a beat before he reached out to tug the mask off. “Let me see your face for a second,” he instructed.

Although Tommy wasn’t sure what he was doing, he didn’t argue as Wilbur lifted the mask over his head, setting it on the comforter before lifting up the compact of eye makeup he’d been using for himself a few minutes prior.

“Close your eyes.”

Tommy did so, and jumped when he felt Wilbur’s fingers touch the skin around his eyes. He quickly relaxed into it though, his pounding heart slowing as he felt sticky makeup being spread under his eyes by calloused thumbs.

Both of them were silent as Wilbur applied the black paint. Tommy’s breaths evened out into something more steady, and he found himself tipping forward, his shoulders dropping as the anxiety leaked out of them.

It wasn’t long before the hands left his face, and Tommy had to bite down a whine at the loss of contact.

When he opened his eyes again, Wilbur was holding out the mirror to him. Tommy could see the two were matching with their raccoon-like eyes, and a bit more of the tension in his chest unwound itself at the thought.

He slipped the mask on again. With the black makeup, his eyes were no longer a washed-out pale blue. Instead, they were far brighter, and reminded Tommy a bit of a cloudless sky on a sunny day.

It still didn’t look like him, but at least he didn’t look like Asphodel.

“Can’t believe you made me emo,” Tommy teased, although his voice was far smaller than he meant it to be.

Wilbur didn’t call him out. Instead, he just huffed. “It looks better though, doesn’t it?”

“...yeah, it does,” Tommy muttered, handing the mirror back to him. Then, in an even softer voice, “Thanks, Wil.”

“Of course,” Wilbur said, reaching out to ruffle his hair. “Now hurry up and get your shoes on. We gotta head out soon or else we’ll be late.”

Smacking Wilbur’s hand away, Tommy rolled his eyes as he pushed himself off the bed and onto the floor. He had already gotten dressed in what Wilbur had told him was his old ‘uniform’ for Syndicate meetings—black jeans, charcoal grey hoodie, and an old black coat that was a hand-me-down from Wilbur. Apparently, Wilbur, Phil, and Techno had a thing about dressing in mostly black as part of their ‘death’ theme. Personally, Tommy thought it made them look like they should be on the cover of a My Chemical Romance album, but to each their own.

After Tommy finished lacing up his sneakers, Wilbur slung his arm around Tommy’s shoulders and led him down the stairs. Techno and Phil were already waiting by the door, with Techno’s black cape securely latched over his shoulders, while Phil’s dark veil was lifted half over his hat.

The two men raised their eyebrows when they noticed Tommy’s look for the evening.

“What happened to your mask?” Techno asked, something like disappointment creeping into his tone.

Before Tommy could even try to come up with an excuse for why he didn’t want to wear the Asphodel mask, Wilbur jumped in.

“We couldn’t find it,” Wilbur lied. “I’m sure it’s around here somewhere, but I knew we were on a time limit so I just figured he could wear an old one of mine for tonight.”

Tommy blinked in surprise at Wilbur, who didn’t even glance his way as he grinned at Techno and Phil. Even though Tommy hadn’t explained anything about why he didn’t want to wear the Asphodel mask, Wilbur lied for him without a single question. All because he saw that Tommy was uncomfortable with the mask.

Warmth bloomed in Tommy’s chest, and he leaned further into Wilbur’s side. The arm around his shoulder squeezed him just a bit tighter, and Wilbur flashed a small smile at him as he took his own mask out of his pocket to put on his face.

“You look like a mini Wilbur,” Phil teased, glancing between the two boys.

“Yeah Wil, I can’t believe you’re taking advantage of an amnesiac kid to make him emo,” Techno chimed in, smirking at the both of them.

“I’ve told you the black makeup is necessary for—”

“Let’s not get into this again,” Phil cut in before Wilbur could go on a tirade. “Anyway, Wilbur, Tommy, you both look very good. We’re gonna be late if we keep chit chatting though, so let’s head out.”

Wilbur huffed but fell silent. With that, Phil opened the front door, and led them out to the sleek, black car waiting in front of the driveway.

It was a car chartered by Las Nevadas, with a chauffeur that was paid enough to see nothing suspicious about a group of supervillains climbing in the backseat of his car. Tommy and Wilbur were a bit squished in the second back row of the seats—Wilbur especially with his long legs, but he didn’t seem bothered as they clambered over with all the gracefulness of newborn horses.

Tommy didn’t know where they were going to hold this meeting. According to Phil, the Syndicate never met in the same location twice, but didn’t give Tommy anymore details than that.

They drove away from the house, and Tommy remembered when Wilbur had had to cover his eyes when they had left for Las Nevadas a few weeks before. Once it had been proven he wasn’t going to escape, Tommy had learned that the family lived on the edge of Prime Heights, which was painfully ironic considering how the heroes had the greatest presence in that part of the city.

The driver was separated from them by a black screen, but even still, no one spoke during the entire ride. The makeup on Tommy's face itched under his mask, but he fought the urge to rub at his eyes, knowing it would just mess it up. Instead, he leaned his forehead against the car window, watching the light from the street lamps blur into a solid streak of orange.

It was a surreal experience. Tommy felt like he was in a dream, with hazy shadows dancing in his vision, the quiet shuffle of Phil and Techno readjusting in their seats, and the soft humming coming from Wilbur paired with the rhythmic tapping of his fingers against the seat. He was going to a Syndicate meeting. This was really a thing that was happening.

He was walking straight into the lion's den. The only question was whether he was a lamb sent to the slaughter, or one of the lions himself.

The drive was far longer than he expected it to be. The car twisted down the streets of L'Manberg, through Prime Heights into the poorer sections of the city, until they were driving between rows and rows of dilapidated buildings. Something lodged itself in Tommy's throat as he recognized this part of the city, considering he had frequented it back when he was living on the streets.

There were few people on the road at this time of night. The car turned down a street that looked as though it was some kind of factory sector, with a few warehouses still in working condition, but most looking as though no one had set foot inside of them in years.

The car slowed to a stop in front of a warehouse that seemed like it would collapse in on itself with the slightest breeze. Broken windows stared out like dark, unseeing eyes. In the faint moonlight, Tommy could make out shattered glass littering the sidewalk.

He had to give them credit. No hero was going to be patrolling an area like this.

"We're here," Phil announced, the first words spoken since they'd gotten into the car.

With that, Phil and Techno both climbed out of the car. Techno then lowered the seat so Wilbur and Tommy could clamber out, and Wilbur almost fell flat on his face because his coat got caught, but Techno caught him before he could get a face full of asphalt.

The night air was cool against Tommy's cheeks, the weak breeze bringing the smell of something rotten with it and making him scrunch up his nose in disgust. As soon as the car door shut behind him, it drove off, and Tommy wondered what the hell the driver was going to do while he waited to pick them up again. Was he just going to drive around in circles? Or did Dionysus have him making other drives tonight?

Tommy wasn't sure. But he wasn't going to find out either, because as soon as the car was gone, a hand on his shoulder started guiding him to the front doors of the warehouse.

The hand belonged to Techno. When Tommy caught his gaze, he squeezed his shoulder in what was probably supposed to be an attempt at comfort, but it didn't change the way Tommy's heart was thundering in his ears.

They got to the doors. Phil stopped abruptly, glancing back at Wilbur and giving him a small nod.

In the blink of an eye, Wilbur turned invisible. Tommy frowned, wondering what he was doing, but his question was quickly answered when the door opened up from the inside. Wilbur stood in the doorway giving Phil a thumbs up, before dropping it to hold the door open for the rest of them.

“They’re all in here,” Wilbur said as Phil passed through the doorway, with Techno and Tommy following close behind.

“Told you we were gonna be late,” Phil snorted, which made Wilbur roll his eyes as he moved away from the door to stand beside Tommy once they were all inside.

The inside of the warehouse was surprisingly large. Faint moonlight filtered in through holes in the ceiling, and the smell of dust was so heavy in the air, Tommy had to shove down the urge to cough. Wooden beams criss-crossed the ceiling, and the floor was made of plain concrete, making each footstep echo off the walls with an almost music-like cadence.

As Tommy’s eyes skimmed over the dark room, it took him a moment to notice the group gathered in the very center of the space, crowded under a single, flickering light that cast eerie shadows across the floor.

His footsteps faltered. Techno frowned at him, clearly confused by his sudden stop. But before he could ask, Techno’s hand was being pushed off of his shoulder by Wilbur, who gave his brother a pointed look.

A moment of silent conversation passed between them, told only in the creases of their lips and the emotions dancing in their eyes. Then, Techno huffed and walked on after Phil, while Wilbur stayed at Tommy’s side.

“If you want to leave, we can,” Wilbur whispered. “I’ll just tell them you feel sick or something.”

An out. Wilbur was offering him an out. Even though they’d driven all the way here, Tommy still had a choice to leave.

But he’d gone all the way here. He might as well see it through.

Swallowing down his anxiety, Tommy instead reached for Wilbur’s hand, the anxiety buzzing in his chest being soothed the tiniest bit when Wilbur squeezed his fingers.

“No, I’m okay,” Tommy whispered back.

Wilbur considered him for a moment, before nodding. “Okay, but if you change your mind let me know.”

The warmth that washed over him at the words was like a balm to his frayed nerves. Tommy clutched Wilbur’s hand tighter, and his brother didn’t make any moves to let go as they resumed walking to the center of the room.

Not counting the four of them, there were eight people sitting around a cheap folding table that had been set up under the singular, flickering light.

Dionysus was the first one Tommy spotted. He was leaning back in his plastic chair, feet propped up and lip tugged into a smirk by the scar that ran down the visible half of his face. To his left was Circe, who had her hands folded in front of her, and Moros beside her, his blue and red eyes bright against the dark makeup he wore under his skull mask.

Across from him, it took Tommy a beat to recognize Minos. He had only seen news footage of the villain before, but his hulking metal armor and matching metal mask that was engraved with carvings to look like bared teeth was unmistakable. Dark green hair was pushed down with a metal crown that looked like it could draw blood if you were to touch one of the spikes, and his eyes were completely black, with only his irises staying the same shade of green as his hair.

There were two people seated on either side of Minos. On his right, there was a woman who Tommy had definitely seen before, but was struggling to put a name to. Hair split-dyed brown and white spilled down her back in wild, untamed curls. Her face was covered by what looked like the skull of a sheep, with brown horns curling back around her ears.

On Minos' left was someone completely unfamiliar to Tommy.

Their mask was more on the plain side, made of smooth metal that covered the lower half of their face painted with shades of yellow and red. A black hoodie was pulled over their head, but Tommy could just make out a shock of white, curly hair, and a pair of deep brown eyes. They had both their arms resting on the table, and Tommy noticed that one of their arms was some kind of mechanical prosthetic, made with similar craftsmanship to the metal armor Minos wore.

As soon as Tommy and Wilbur approached the table, the woman with the split-dyed hair jumped to her feet, a bright smile stretching her cheeks as she walked around the table straight towards him.

"Holy shit, Tommy, you're actually here!" She exclaimed, her tone full of foreign warmth.
"Or, well, Asphodel I mean. Sorry for the slipup. But I had no idea you were going to come tonight! We've all been so worried about you, kiddo!"

Tommy tensed as she stopped right in front of him, squeezing Wilbur's hand as he tried to put a name to her mask. She reached up as if to cup his cheek but he immediately flinched back, and she yanked her hand away as if she'd been burnt.

"I, um-"

"Rhadamanthus," Wilbur cut in, narrowing his eyes at the woman, "I get you're excited, but he doesn't know who you are."

Rhadamanthus. Of course. From what he could remember when Dream gave him the rundown on the known Syndicate members, she was a rarely seen figure, and very little was

known about what her abilities were. All Dream told him was that she was powerful, and left it at that.

The smile immediately fell from Rhadamanthus' face. "Oh. I'm sorry, I just thought if you were here that meant—"

"We can go over it more during the meeting," Phil then said, having settled himself at the head of the table. "But we might need to give some introductions for Asphodel's sake, given his current condition."

"That's probably for the best," Minos agreed, his voice deep and distorted by his mask.
"There are some seats next to Lethe and Styx I believe."

Lethe and Styx.

Whipping his head to the other end of the table, Tommy's eyes fell on the last two figures he hadn't gotten a good look at until now.

Tommy didn't recognize either of the figures as villains he'd seen before. One had a brass mask that covered everything from the nose up, carved with intricate vines and flames in a shape that was reminiscent of a goat. Two horns stuck out from the top of the mask, and while Rhadamanthus' horns were curved, his were completely straight and had razor point tips.

The other villain was much taller than the first. A black lace mourning veil covered his entire head, with a black bandana tied around the lower half of his face underneath. The only part of his face Tommy could make out was a pair of mismatched eyes, and Tommy jolted as he realized who he was staring at.

He shouldn't have been surprised. Tubbo and Ranboo had told him they were members of the Syndicate, but for some reason he hadn't made the connection that they would be at this meeting.

Even though he knew this should upset him, he couldn't help but feel the slightest bit relieved that the two of them were here. They were beacons of familiarity among the strange villains he barely recognized, so he didn't fight as Wilbur tugged him towards the two empty chairs that sat next to his friends.

Despite the relief he felt at having Tubbo and Ranboo here, Tommy still didn't let go of Wilbur's hand as he sat down next to Tubbo. Thankfully, Wilbur didn't try to pull away, because he was the anchor currently rooting Tommy to the ground.

"What happened to your old mask, bossman?" Tubbo whispered as soon as Tommy settled himself.

"Couldn't find it so I borrowed one of Wil's," Tommy explained, repeating the same lie Wilbur had given Techno earlier.

"Aw, damn shame. Your old mask is cool as hell."

Tommy wasn't sure what to say to that, so he just nodded and turned to look at the rest of the table while squeezing Wilbur's fingers just a tad bit tighter.

"Sorry for being late, though I feel you know the routine at this point with Orpheus," Phil joked, and a quiet laugh echoed around the table.

Wilbur huffed but didn't say anything to defend himself. This must've been some kind of running joke for the group at this point.

"So, before we get to business, first we need to address the elephant in the room," Phil continued, folding his clawed fingertips together. "As you all can see, Asphodel has returned to us. However, his memories have not returned yet, so I'd like to do a round of introductions to make sure he's up to speed on everyone's code names."

Everyone's eyes immediately turned to look at him, and Tommy's skin crawled with the weight of the stares. He had to fight the urge to press himself against Wilbur's side, and clenched his jaw to keep his expression as neutral as he possibly could.

"I guess I'll start," Minos began. "You can call me Minos."

"Rhadamanthus," Rhadamanthus then said.

Tommy's eyes then flickered to the stranger he didn't recognize at all, but there was something nagging in the back of his mind the longer he stared at them. It wasn't a memory, but there was a sense of familiarity there telling him that he should definitely know who this was.

"I go by Aeacus," they said, fiddling with the fingers of their prosthetic as they dipped their head at Tommy.

Hm. The name Aeacus didn't ring any bells, which was odd considering Dream had told Tommy the names of all known Syndicate members during his training. That meant the heroes didn't know this Aeacus figure even existed.

Odd.

"Lethe," Ranboo chimed in, and even though Tommy couldn't see his mouth, he had a feeling Ranboo was smiling at him.

"Call me Styx, bossman," Tubbo declared, nudging Tommy with his elbow.

"You know me and Moros," Circe then said, giving him a soft smile that did little to ease Tommy's anxiety.

"We all know I don't need to introduce myself," Dionysus told the room, his smirk growing as he moved his arms behind his head.

Then, they were back at the front, with Techno and Phil obviously not needing to clarify their names.

“Asphodel, is there anyone else you’re confused about?” Phil then asked.

Every time Phil called him Asphodel, it was like a shot of ice straight through his chest, but it’s not like it would’ve been any better if they called him Lucid instead. So he fought the urge to flinch, and instead just shook his head.

“I’m good.” His voice was far quieter than he meant it to be, and it seemed to surprise the others at the table as well, judging by the confused glances they all shared when he spoke.

There was a soft squeak as Wilbur shifted his chair closer to Tommy’s so that their shoulders were brushing. Tommy forced himself to take a deep breath to try and steady his nerves. His brother was here, and so were his friends. He was fine.

“So now that that’s taken care of, we can move onto the main order of business,” Phil continued, talons tapping against the edge of the table. “We need to discuss Dream.”

As if a switch had been flipped, everyone at the table frowned, with something dark settling in the air like a cloud.

“Now that we have Asphodel back, we need to figure out what happened to make him lose his memories in the first place, and what we are going to do in retaliation.”

Retaliation. Fuck. Tommy didn’t like the sound of that.

“We’re planning on retaliating?” Aeacus asked, furrowing their brows.

“Of course we are,” Phil huffed, as if it was obvious. “Dream *took* my son from me. That’s not something we can just let go unpunished.”

“Not to mention, he forced Asphodel to be his healer even though he knew it hurt him,” Techno added, leaning back in his seat.

Wait, what?

“That’s not true,” Tommy jumped in before he could think twice about it. “I was never forced to be Dream’s healer. I did it willingly.”

“You had amnesia and no place to stay. Dream was your only source of shelter and food. Are you telling me that you didn’t have the slightest worry that that might be taken away from you if you were to refuse to be Lucid?” Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

Tommy clenched his jaw. While he wanted to say that wasn’t true, that he knew Dream would’ve taken care of him even if he said no, he also knew that wasn’t the full truth. In the beginning at least, a very small part of Tommy had been worried about what might happen if he said no to Dream’s offer. He knew he owed Dream for everything he did for him, so it was only natural that he had to help him out in return.

“Only in the beginning,” Tommy explained, forcing himself to meet Techno’s eyes. “Once I actually started fighting you lot, it became something I wanted to do even more than Dream did.”

"And that's understandable given what you saw us do," Phil hummed. "But you should never have been put in that situation in the first place."

"While I understand why you're upset," Rhadamanthus cut in, straightening up in her seat, "I think we also need to consider whether it's actually worth it to seek revenge for this. I know we're all upset over what happened to Asphodel, but we have a bigger goal we need to focus on. If we put all our energy into getting one up on Dream for this, it's just going to hinder our progress in the long run."

"I dunno, I think we might need to put the heroes in their place to remind them they can't fuck with us like that," Moros argued, earning him a sharp look from Rhadamanthus. "What? I'm just saying, Dream kidnapped one of our fucking members, brainwashed him to hate us, and we're just gonna let that go?"

"He's right. We can't just let something like that go," Circe nodded, her mouth set in a grim line.

"I'm with Circe and Moros here. Dream needs to get his shit rocked," Tubbo jumped in, ignoring the shocked look Tommy sent his way. Past Tubbo, Tommy saw Ranboo shrink back in his seat, not making any moves to join the discussion.

"Revenge is stupid and acting like it's gonna get us anywhere is just wasting our time," Aeacus said, huffing as they folded their arms over their chest. Beside them, Minos nodded in agreement.

This... This was wrong. Tommy didn't want to hear this. He didn't want to hear the Syndicate talk about how they were going to take revenge on Dream on his behalf. Not when he was still unsure what his opinion of Dream even was.

"Have you considered actually fucking asking me what I want?" Tommy snapped suddenly, making all eyes in the room turn to him.

Phil made a disapproving tsking sound. "You don't have your memories back yet, Asphodel. Your opinion is biased."

"Then why the hell did you bring me here?!" Tommy shouted. Wilbur squeezed his hand in silent warning, but Tommy yanked away from his grasp as he slammed his fist down on the table. "You know damn well I don't want you taking revenge on Dream! Why the fuck would you bring me to this thing if this was all you were gonna talk about?!"

"If you still like Dream then why didn't you escape when you could at Las Nevadas?" Dionysus asked, speaking up for the first time since the discussion began.

And that was something Tommy still didn't have an answer for. Something he desperately wanted to find out, but couldn't even figure out how to put into words.

Before Tommy could try to figure out how the hell he was going to respond to that though, Wilbur spoke up instead.

“Can you stop giving him the third goddamn degree?” Wilbur snapped, pushing to his feet and shooting a glare Dionysus’ way.

“I think it’s a valid question to ask,” Dionysus shot back.

Wilbur scoffed. “This is fucking ridiculous. We should be grateful that Tommy is even willing to stay with us despite the fact that he doesn’t remember who we are, and here you are getting pissy because he doesn’t want to listen to us plan revenge on his mentor. Can you pull your head out of your asses for one fucking second to try and put yourself in Tommy’s shoes?”

“Orpheus, watch your tone and remember to use the code names,” Phil said, a warning clear in his voice.

“No! I’m not gonna watch my fucking tone because I told you that if we brought Tommy here, something like this was going to happen!” Wilbur was scowling at Phil now, and Tommy couldn’t remember ever seeing Wilbur this angry. “You insisted he was ready even though I told you he wasn’t! This isn’t fair to him, don’t you see that?!”

“I didn’t force him to come. If he wanted to say no, he could’ve,” Phil argued, sounding infuriatingly calm. “But you’re right in pointing out that we probably shouldn’t discuss this in front of him. We can move on for now and go over this at the next meeting.”

So they weren’t dropping the idea of revenge, just pushing it away until Tommy wasn’t around to protest. Great.

“I just don’t understand why I’m even here,” Tommy said, letting Wilbur tug him back into his seat. “Just because I’m not trying to run away doesn’t mean I’m okay with any of the shit you’ve done.”

“Do you want to leave?”

The question from Techno startled Tommy. It was so simple. Did he want to leave?

They were going to move on from the topic of revenge. While a part of Tommy wanted to stick around to hear what else they talked about, there was anger simmering in his chest, and he hated the way they all kept staring at him. He could see it in all their eyes. The longing and familiarity, but the disappointment too.

Disappointment that he wasn’t the same as he once was. Disappointment because he wasn’t the person they wanted sitting at the table.

“Yeah, actually I do,” Tommy said, getting to his feet again.

Wilbur stood up as well, and Tommy frowned at him. “You don’t have to leave. I can just wait outside.”

Huffing, Wilbur shot a glare at the rest of the table. “Nah, I don’t think there’s much point in me staying either right now.”

"We can fill you in later," Phil agreed, although Wilbur frowned when he said that. "Go wait outside with Tommy, and yell if you need anything."

Then, without any hesitation, Wilbur grabbed Tommy's shoulder and led him away from the table. Under the dark, glittering makeup, Tommy could see Wilbur's eyes were almost burning, and he had to admit, it was nice to see that he and Wilbur were feeling the same thing at this moment.

Their footsteps echoed off the walls as they headed back to the doors of the warehouse. The door creaked open, and Wilbur held it open as Tommy walked through, before letting it slam shut behind both of them with a deafening *bang!*

As soon as the door was shut, Tommy let out a sigh of relief before slumping against the wall. The night air was cool against his flushed cheeks, and he moved his hands up to drag his hands down his face, but stopped when he remembered the mask still tied around his head.

"Well, that was a shitfest," Wilbur muttered, his shoulder brushing Tommy's as he leaned on the wall beside him.

Tommy huffed. "You can say that again. I really don't know what the hell Ph- well, *Thanatos* was trying to do by bringing me along."

He expected Wilbur to snort and say something snarky in agreement, but instead, he was silent. Furrowing his brows, Tommy glanced over to Wilbur to see what he was doing, and immediately noticed the tense line of his shoulders.

"...why did he bring me to the meeting?" Tommy asked quietly.

Wilbur's gaze fell to the ground as he picked at a hangnail on his thumb. His hair fell over his face, obscuring his eyes from Tommy's view.

"It was sort of a test," Wilbur admitted in a low voice. "He wanted to see if letting you see everyone again would trigger your memories to come back."

Oh.

Oh.

The words hurt more than Tommy expected them to. Of course it made sense. Even if Phil was understanding about the fact that Tommy might not be the same person he was, he was still going to try and get Tommy's memories to come back. It was only natural, and Tommy knew he would probably want the same thing if he was in Phil's place.

But hearing that was yet another reminder that they wanted back a Tommy he might not be able to give them. Phil wanted his son back. Techno and Wilbur wanted their brother back. Tubbo and Ranboo wanted their best friend back. The rest of the Syndicate wanted Asphodel back.

In the end, it didn't even work. Tommy hadn't even known Puffy or Ponk's names until they announced themselves-

Wait.

Rhadamanthus' name was Puffy. Aeacus' name was Ponk. Minos' name was Sam.

Puffy had a wicked sense of humor and used to help Tommy pull pranks on the other Syndicate members before meetings. Sam could be stern, but he was also kind, and had a sweet husky-wolf hybrid named Fran who Tommy absolutely adored. Ponk was also funny as hell, and Tommy had talked to them about gardening on several different occasions before.

There was something else about Ponk that was bugging Tommy. He remembered what they looked like without their mask now, and there was something nagging in his mind telling him he'd seen that face somewhere recently, but couldn't put a name to where it was.

Before he could think about it for too long though, Wilbur's voice cut through his thoughts again.

"Tommy, what is it? You look like you've just seen a ghost."

Shit. Like most of the memories he got back these days, his memories of the Syndicate filtered through his mind as if they'd always been there. While he couldn't remember the specifics of things they'd talked about in past meetings, he could remember the excitement that bubbled up inside of him hearing the group talk about their upcoming plans. He could remember laughter crackling in the air whenever someone told a particularly funny joke. He could remember the warmth, the sense of belonging he had as Asphodel.

The old Tommy had belonged to the Syndicate. The new Tommy... didn't.

"I'm okay," Tommy forced himself to say, even though the buzzing in his chest told him he was anything but.

"Are you sure?" Wilbur pushed, reaching out to rest a hand on his shoulder.

Tommy blinked as Wilbur's worried face filled his vision. There was a tight band wrapping around his chest as he thought back to how distant that sense of belonging was from him now. How alien the Syndicate had felt tonight compared to the Syndicate in his memories.

It wasn't him. He wasn't Asphodel. He couldn't be the Tommy they wanted him to be, because he was supposed to be happy to be back with them, wasn't he? But his memories were like a TV screen in his mind—a barrier he could never actually pass through.

Wilbur was waiting for his answer.

His *brother* was waiting for his answer.

"No," Tommy whispered, the confession spilling from his lips unbidden. "I... I've been—"

Tommy's attempt at a confession was cut off by a new voice appearing from behind Wilbur.

"Hate to interrupt whatever moment you two have going on, but do you mind telling me where I could find someone?"

Stiffening, Wilbur whirled around, placing himself in between Tommy and the stranger. Still, despite Wilbur's attempts at shielding him, Tommy was able to look over his shoulder to see the newcomer for himself.

Tommy didn't recognize the guy. He seemed to be somewhere in his early to mid twenties, with light blonde hair, an oversized white hoodie that seemed almost suspiciously clean, and had a white bandana covering the lower half of his face.

There was something off about him. Tommy couldn't explain it, but the longer he stared at the guy, the more the hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

"Who are you looking for?" Wilbur asked tightly.

The guy's pale eyes flickered to Tommy's face, and a predatory grin quirked at the corners of his lips.

"I'm looking for a former hero who seems to have gone a little too native. You might know him as Lucid."

And just like that, Tommy realized why this guy was so unsettling.

His stance, the oversized hoodie that could conceal so many things, the calculating glint in his eye—this guy had to be a hunter. More specifically, a hunter that Dream had hired to find him.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

HAHA SORRY FOR THE CLIFFHANGER just because I'm not participating in april fool's pranks doesn't mean I can't still be a bit mean with my update :) also fun fact I finally have finished out planning the rest of this fic, so hopefully we can hit the 20 chapter mark I set up, although knowing me and my long ass chapters that number will probably grow

also, word of clarification for the names: I'm referencing Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus as the figures they more were once they were judges of the dead in the underworld rather than their living selves. just a note as to why I picked those names!

(oh and for people wondering why I chose the names I did for bench trio: Lethe is Ranboo's Syndicate name in dsmp, Styx was a river that made Achilles invulnerable on almost his entire body much like how force fields make Tubbo invulnerable, and Asphodel was mostly a reference to the Asphodel Fields, with Tommy not being a full

member of the Syndicate and being more on the neutral side of things in the sense of not being allowed to participate due to his power being more of a harm than a help, but also because he had influence over if someone died thanks to his healing abilities)

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed! I had so much fun coming up with all the mask designs and the names. also, glittery eye makeup wilbur for the win lmao

I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic or want the opportunity to ask me questions go check it out here
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I have a playlist for this fic! check it out [here](#)

let me know what you thought down in the comments below! i don't reply to most but I read them all and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

hunters

Chapter Summary

Dealing with the unexpected arrival.

Chapter Notes

hi yes i know what a fast update right?? I actually had finished writing chapter 14 on like late wednesday night, so by the time i posted it on friday I was already itching to start the next one so I wrote nearly all of this chapter on friday and finished it up yesterday. can you tell I was excited to write this one?

sorry for the cliffhanger my dears, but at least I haven't kept you waiting in suspense too long. I hope you enjoy what I have in store for this chapter :)

TWs for: semi panic attack descriptions, mention of a panic attack, blood mention, stabbing, general violence and fighting

hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Well, this situation wasn't great.

The hunter stared at him and Wilbur, a silent taunt dancing in his pale eyes. Wilbur was practically pressing Tommy against the wall now, trying to keep him shielded as his hands curled into fists at his sides.

"I hate to break it to you, but Lucid's not here," Wilbur lied, narrowing his eyes at the hunter.

"Really? You guys have him tied up in a basement somewhere?" The hunter asked, raising one eyebrow.

Wilbur snorted. "Something like that. He's tucked away somewhere you won't be able to find him."

It was strange to watch the Orpheus persona Tommy hadn't seen in so long flip on again like a switch. Wilbur was smirking, a faux show of arrogance that was an obvious attempt at a bluff. But still, Tommy could see the way his hands were flickering between being see through and solid, and he knew Wilbur was far more nervous than he was trying to let on.

“You sure about that?” The hunter questioned, cocking his head to the side. “It’s one hell of a coincidence that the kid you got behind you has the same name as Lucid then. Same height and build too.”

Oh shit.

Wilbur had called him Tommy only a few minutes ago. The hunter must’ve been listening to their conversation, and that had to have been the thing that confirmed who Tommy was to him.

All of the color drained out of Wilbur’s face as his fists uncurled. The hunter laughed, and it was a grating sound that made Tommy wince.

“C’mon, let’s make this easy on everyone and just hand him over,” the hunter said, taking a step towards them.

Tommy’s heart leapt into his throat. This hunter was going to take him back to Dream. If that happened, he’d probably have to go back to fighting the Syndicate, and Dream would definitely interrogate him for their identities.

Fuck. He couldn’t let that happen.

“Tell Dream he can fuck off,” Tommy snapped, peeking his head out from behind Wilbur’s shoulder to glare at the hunter.

The hunter blinked in obvious surprise. “Oh? Dream thought you’d practically be clawing at the walls trying to get back to him. Kind of interesting to see that’s not the case.”

Guilt squeezed his chest hard enough to make him gasp, but he forced himself to shove it down and meet the hunter’s glare head on. Even if he wasn’t sure where he stood with the Syndicate, he couldn’t go back to Dream. Not right now. Especially not with Wilbur holding onto his wrist hard enough to leave a bruise, clearly terrified at the idea of losing Tommy again.

Truth be told, Tommy couldn’t even stomach the idea of being separated from Wilbur again. Not like this.

His back bumped against the wall again, and Tommy jolted as he remembered the Syndicate was right behind those doors. He could try to shove his way inside, and yell at them to get out here. This one hunter would be no match for the entire Syndicate.

Slowly, Tommy tried to inch his way to the doors. But he hadn’t even gotten two steps before the hunter’s head whipped towards him.

Then, the hunter ran at them.

He pulled out twin daggers, and Wilbur went on defense immediately. The two were blurs of movement as the hunter tried to land a hit on Wilbur, and Wilbur kept going intangible right as the blades passed through him.

The hunter was fast though. *Too* fast by normal standards. His arms were nothing more than faint blurs as he swiped at Wilbur over and over again, and Tommy realized his power must've had to do with speed right as Wilbur yelled out in pain.

“Shit!” Wilbur shouted, gripping his arm as dark blood dripped down his sleeve.

And that-

That triggered something in Tommy.

It was like a switch had been flipped. One moment, Tommy was frozen, watching Wilbur and the hunter go at it. The next thing he knew though, Asphodel’s fiery rage that had felt so distant from him in his memories was surging through his veins, and Tommy rushed at the hunter with a brutal scream.

“Don’t fucking touch him!”

The hunter didn’t have time to move before Tommy barreled into him, tackling him to the ground and sending one of his daggers sliding across the concrete. Using the hand that still had his weapon, the hunter swiped it at his face, and Tommy lunged back just in time, sprawling backwards onto the concrete.

They both scrambled to their feet at the same time. The hunter disappeared into a blur, and Tommy yelped as he only just managed to dodge every swipe the hunter made at him. Dream’s training kicked in, and Tommy was working entirely off muscle memory, the fire in his blood making his blood roar in his ears as he ducked under another swipe from the hunter.

Suddenly, the hunter stopped moving, his hand held up in the air by Wilbur. He narrowed his eyes, yanking his hand out of Wilbur’s grip and disappearing into a blur again. Wilbur turned intangible just as the hunter attempted to stab him in the gut, and Tommy’s heart leapt into his throat seeing how close that was.

The hunter disappeared into a blur of motion again. Suddenly, pain exploded across Tommy’s shoulder, and he yelled as he realized he had been cut right along his collarbone.

“What the-”

Before Tommy could finish that sentence, the hunter was barreling into him, sending him slamming against the wall of the warehouse. He pinned Tommy’s hands above his head, and then used his free hand to press the knife to Tommy’s stomach.

“I’m not supposed to kill you, but I’m sure we can get you to a healer before you bleed out,” the hunter said, the tip of the knife barely cutting into his skin. “You hear that, Orpheus? Either you let me take him, or I’m gonna stab him and hope he doesn’t bleed out.”

Over the hunter’s shoulder, Tommy locked eyes with Wilbur, who was staring at him with blatant terror.

It was then Tommy noticed something... strange. From the place where the hunter was holding his wrists, Tommy could feel some kind of energy humming across the hunter’s skin.

Like the same kind of energy he felt whenever he used his healing powers—a warmth pooling in his palms, with that warmth having spread out over the hunter's hands as well.

If Tommy focused, it was almost like he could pull on that warmth. When he usually healed, Tommy was pushing his own warmth out of his hands and onto someone else. But if he focused, he realized with this hunter he could take that warmth for himself, as if he was sucking it into his skin from the point of contact he had with the hunter's bare hands.

While Tommy wasn't sure what exactly it was he was doing, the hunter seemed to notice. As Tommy started pulling on the warmth, the hunter stiffened, his eyes blowing wide as he whipped his head towards Tommy.

"What the hell are you doing?" He asked, blood draining from his face.

Tommy didn't reply, just tried to pull even harder on the warmth. His heart began to pump faster, a surge of energy rushing through him that made him want to tug even more on the energy. Along with that, the pain from the cut on his collarbone faded away until it was nothing. The hunter let out a pained gasp, and with a sharp jolt, he was yanking his hands away from Tommy's.

"What the *fuck* did you do to me?!" The hunter yelled, his hands trembling as he stepped away from Tommy.

Before Tommy could even try to figure out how to answer that, Wilbur lunged for the hunter, seeming like he wanted to use the moment of distraction to pin the gun down.

Except... the hunter wasn't as out of it as he seemed.

As soon as Wilbur moved towards him, he was spinning around, yelling as he thrust the knife forward.

Tommy ran forward, but as he slammed into the hunter to get him away from Wilbur, he realized it was too late.

The hunter fell to the ground with a loud grunt. But the knife was no longer in his hands, because it was embedded in Wilbur's gut.

Turning away from the hunter, Tommy's eyes went wide when he saw Wilbur hunched over in pain. Dark blood dripped onto the concrete below him, and as Wilbur collapsed to the ground, Tommy tried to jump off of the hunter to run towards him.

Key word being tried.

Before he could even get to his feet, there was a hand on his hood, yanking him backwards with blinding force. His head slammed into the ground, sending his vision spinning. The hunter climbed on top of Tommy, pinning him to the ground and lifting a fist next to his head, winding up for a punch.

Shit. Fuck. *Fuck*.

He waited for the punch to land. The punch that would probably knock him out cold.

But it never came.

When Tommy blinked open his eyes, he realized that something green had wrapped itself around the hunter's fist. It was a vine, and the hunter looked just as confused as Tommy as he tried to pull against the vine.

It didn't move. Instead, the vine wrapped further around his fingers, and the hunter let out a pained sound as Tommy noticed thorns cutting into the skin of his hand.

"PUNZ!"

A woman's voice echoed across the street, and Tommy turned his head to the left to see an unfamiliar figure walking towards him and the hunter. She had one hand in the air, pointed at the vine still snaking tighter around the hunter's fist. The other hand was holding onto a sword that dragged against the ground, the scratching sound making Tommy feel like his ears were bleeding.

The woman herself was wearing a mask that looked to be made of wood and flowers. Long, dark hair fell down her back in thick ringlets, and when there was a flutter of something pale behind her, Tommy realized the woman had fucking *fairy wings*.

"Hannah, what the—" the hunter—Punz apparently—gasped as the vines dug tighter into his hand, "what the hell are you doing?!"

Hannah slowed to a stop right in front of them, slowly curling her outstretched hand into a fist and making the vines grow even tighter. "I should ask you the same question. This was *my* bounty, Punz. Not yours."

"Well that's your fault for being too slow!" Punz snapped, gritting his teeth as blood began to drip down from his hand and onto Tommy's shirt.

"Let him go and give him to me, and I might let you keep the use of your hand," Hannah demanded, her voice sharp enough to cut through metal.

"Are you kidding? I'm not giving him to you! I found him—"

Punz was cut off by the sound of a door slamming open. Both he and Hannah whipped their heads to the source of the noise, and Hannah's wings fluttered faster as the vines fell slack on Punz's hand.

"Huh, seems like we finished up just in time," Phil said, and Tommy almost cried in relief.

"Oh fuck this," Hannah muttered, turning on her heel before lifting off into the air.

She was gone in seconds, leaving only Punz who was still sitting on top of Tommy.

There was a flash of movement behind Punz, and suddenly, Techno yanked him off of Tommy, sending the hunter sliding across the concrete. Now free of the weight on his chest,

Tommy sucked in a greedy breath, head spinning as he tried to process everything that had just happened.

Wait. Wilbur.

Stumbling to his feet, Tommy sprinted for Wilbur, who was curled up on the ground with the knife still in his stomach. His face was twisted up with pain, but despite that, Tommy almost sobbed with relief seeing he was still breathing.

“Shit! Are you okay? Can you hear me?” Tommy asked, rolling his brother onto his back.

Wilbur winced. “I- I’m okay. Hurts like a fucking bitch though.”

Oh thank *god*. Wilbur hadn’t pulled the dagger out, meaning he wasn’t bleeding nearly as much as he would be otherwise.

“This’ll be interesting to tell Dream,” Punz said from behind him, making Tommy stiffen.

Techno looked like he was two seconds away from lunging at Punz, but the minute he so much as twitched a muscle, the hunter was speeding away across the street. He locked eyes with Tommy one last time, and dread curled in Tommy’s stomach as he imagined what Punz was going to say to Dream.

Then, in the blink of an eye, Punz was gone. This left only the Syndicate.

While Tommy knew he should be more worried about Punz, at the moment he couldn’t think of anything else but Wilbur. Turning back to his brother, his hands fluttered over the knife, silently debating if he should warn Wilbur before pulling it out or not so he could heal it.

Before Tommy could do anything though, there was a strong pair of arms dragging him away from Wilbur.

“Wh- What are you doing?!?” Tommy screamed, twisting in Techno’s grip to no avail. “I need to heal him!”

“No, you don’t,” Techno said, his arms like iron bars as he held Tommy to his chest.

“Yes I fucking do!”

What the fuck was wrong with Techno? Did he not want Tommy to heal his own goddamn brother?!

Techno continued to pull him away from Wilbur, and Tommy snarled as he tried everything he could to break out of Techno’s grip. That was his brother. His brother who he had only just gotten back. His brother who he thought was dead but he wasn’t, and now that he finally found him again he was just going to lose him a second fucking time and it wasn’t fucking fair-

“Let go of me!” Tommy screamed, snarling as he clawed at Techno’s arms.

Aeacus was moving towards Wilbur, and Wilbur still *wasn't* moving. Was his breath getting more shallow? Tommy couldn't tell from this distance, but it might've been getting more shallow. Tommy had no idea how much time Wilbur had left but he had been fucking stabbed, why the hell weren't they letting him heal him?

His blood was boiling now. That rage from earlier was still there, telling Tommy that this wasn't fair. He needed to save his brother. He had to. Wilbur was *his* and he wasn't going to lose him so goddamn soon.

"Let me go to him! Please!" Tommy begged, his snarls turning to sobs as he continued to try and claw at Techno's arms. His thoughts were spinning and he couldn't even hear what the others were saying. His vision blurred with tears, and he was hyperventilating as his head just kept screaming at him to save him, to help him, to heal Wilbur because he was going to die if he didn't.

Distantly, Tommy could hear that Techno was saying something to him. But he couldn't even process it. He couldn't stop staring at Wilbur's limp body. The body that Aeacus was kneeling in front of. Their prosthetic hand glinted in the moonlight as they pulled the knife from his gut, triggering dark blood to spill out across the concrete and making Tommy scream even louder.

There was a flash of pink in his vision that Tommy guessed was Circe moving towards him. No. No, he couldn't let her do her weird calm down thing on him. Not when Wilbur could be dying.

"Don't fucking touch me!" He snarled, and to his surprise, the blurry figure immediately backed away.

He couldn't breathe. Wilbur was going to die and no one was doing anything. No one was letting him do anything. He needed to heal him. He had to save him. He couldn't move and he couldn't breathe and Wilbur was going to die he would be dead and gone and- and-

In his panic, Tommy didn't even register what Aeacus was doing until they put their hands on Wilbur's abdomen. There was no glow, but the blood from Wilbur's stomach that was spreading across the sidewalk began to... reverse?

It was like Aeacus had hit the rewind button on the wound. The blood disappeared, and Tommy watched as the wound sealed itself up as if it had never been there in the first place. The tear in Wilbur's shirt even repaired itself, and Tommy was left gaping as Aeacus moved back, lifting their hands and meeting Tommy's eyes with a small nod.

Reconstruction. That was Aeacus' power. The ability to reconstruct things perfectly as they were, including human bodies.

Suddenly, Tommy realized why Aeacus was so familiar.

Restore had been a hero long before Tommy had become Lucid. During his training, Dream had shown Tommy footage of the hero, showing old news footage of them fighting Minos and using it as an example for what not to do.

Tommy was told that Restore had been in a fight with Minos, and got killed as a result. The other heroes even found their severed arm, and knew that if Restore had still been alive, they would've been able to reattach their limb with their powers. Although their body was never found, that was enough evidence to classify them as KIA, with Minos having been attributed to dealing the blow.

But... this was Restore. Tommy recognized them.

The pieces fell into place. Ponk must've faked their death with Sam's help, cutting off their arm and leaving it for the Heroes to find. Now they worked as Aeacus, the healer for the Syndicate.

Holy shit.

"Tommy, can you hear me?"

It was like he was coming up for air after being underwater for ages. Techno's voice was no longer muffled, and the panic seizing his chest in a violent grip was finally loosening its hold. He sucked in a ragged breath, his throat feeling horribly raw.

"He stopped screaming, so that's a good sign," another voice said, and it took Tommy a beat to recognize Phil's voice.

Whipping his head to the left, he saw Phil standing next to him, his clawed fingers reaching for his face.

Although a part of Tommy wanted to rip his head away, he found himself leaning forward, more tears spilling down his cheeks when Phil's cool hand cradled his cheek. Techno's arms let go of his own, and Tommy slumped forward, Phil catching him right before he face planted into the concrete.

"Tommy? Can you hear me?" Phil asked, his claws carding through Tommy's hair.

Tommy nodded, legs trembling violently under him. He took a few more stuttered breaths, focusing on the chills running down his spine from the light scratching on his scalp. It was soothing, and Tommy desperately needed something soothing right then.

"You're okay," Phil whispered into his hair, "Wil's okay, and you're okay. You're both okay. You can breathe, Tommy."

He latched onto the words like a drowning man, counting his breaths in time with the rise and fall of Phil's chest.

After another minute, Tommy finally found his footing. He straightened up, pulling away from Phil without a word. No one tried to grab him this time as he stumbled towards Wilbur, who had sat up now and was flickering between intangibility and being solid.

When Tommy fell next to him though, he stopped flickering. Tommy didn't even have to say anything. Wilbur just reached forward, and Tommy collapsed into his arms, burying his face in the blood-stained fabric of Wilbur's coat and holding on as tightly as he could.

"Hey, it's okay," Wilbur reassured him, sounding a little out of breath but not too worse for wear. "I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere."

"I thought- I thought I'd lost you again," Tommy whispered, so low that he wasn't even sure if Wilbur could hear it.

Wilbur stiffened for a moment, opening his mouth like he wanted to ask something. But after a few beats, he closed his mouth, and just hugged Tommy tighter. In his exhausted state, Tommy didn't even notice.

"You didn't lose me," he finally said.

Tommy didn't lose him. His brother was here, and he was hugging Tommy, and he was alive. Tommy wouldn't have to mourn him twice.

They stayed like that for a few minutes in silence. Wilbur was shaking almost as much as Tommy was, and Tommy wasn't sure if that was from the blood loss or something else. Eventually though, footsteps approached from behind, but Tommy didn't bother to look up. He just clung to Wilbur tighter.

"Wil, are you okay to stand?" Circe asked softly.

"Um, I think so. I don't know if Tommy is though," Wilbur said, squeezing the arms he had around Tommy's back.

"Tommy?" Circe whispered. "Can I help you calm down just a bit more? I know you didn't want me to earlier, but I think it might help you feel better."

Even though Tommy wanted to say he had already calmed down, he knew he really hadn't. His heart was still pounding in his ears, and the mere thought of letting go of Wilbur made him want to burst into tears all over again even though he'd be surprised if he had any tears left inside of him.

Silently, he nodded, and he felt a slim hand rest on his back. Like the last time she'd done this, his heart rate immediately began to slow. The fog in his mind didn't grow any heavier though, and he was surprised when thinking actually became easier instead of harder.

She didn't slow his heart down as much as she did the first time. Instead, she just slowed it enough to let him take a deep breath again, and Tommy went limp against Wilbur as he took his first deep breath since Punz showed up.

"Thank you," Tommy said, his voice hoarse.

It wasn't just a thanks for her calming him down right now. It was also a thanks for the fact that she actually listened to him earlier, even though he was high strung on panic to the point where he nearly passed out, she still didn't use her abilities on him when he made it clear he didn't want her to.

Niki hummed, before moving her hand onto Wilbur's chest. "Your turn, Wil."

“I’m fine.”

“You’re shaking like a leaf,” Niki told him. “You don’t have to hide it. I can feel your heart racing.”

Wilbur let out a shaky sigh, and gave a small nod of permission. Then, a few seconds passed in silence, and Tommy felt the tension drain out of Wilbur’s shoulders as he melted into Tommy’s hug.

“Thanks,” Wilbur mumbled.

“You’re welcome. Now can you two stand up for me? We need to get going in case other hunters show up.”

Even though Tommy’s heart wasn’t racing anymore, a spike of fear still shot through him at the idea of someone else showing up to hurt his brother. Niki was right. They needed to go.

“As long as no one pulls me away from him again,” Tommy muttered.

Wilbur snorted. “Clingy child.”

“Fuck off, asshole,” Tommy shot back, finally lifting his head to meet Wilbur’s eyes. “You’re being just as clingy right now.”

“You have a point,” Wilbur huffed. “But we do need to stand up.”

Pouting, Tommy shifted so he wasn’t wrapped around Wilbur’s chest like a koala, but grabbed his hand and refused to let go as they both struggled to their feet. Wilbur stumbled a bit when he stood, and Tommy wrapped an arm around him to keep him steady.

Looking around, Tommy realized the entire Syndicate was staring at him with a mixture of worry and confusion. Rhadamanthus seemed like she was holding herself back from walking over to hug him, Dionysus looked downright scared, Aeacus was leaning against Minos’ side but was watching them both with a frown all the same, Tubbo and Ranboo both seemed like they were afraid Tommy was a wild animal who was going to lash out at any moment, while Techno and Phil seemed the calmest out of everyone.

“Our car is here,” Phil said softly, pointing to the same black car they’d taken to get there that had pulled up on the street.

Techno, meanwhile, moved over to Wilbur’s other side. “Here, let me—”

“No,” Tommy snapped, cutting him off. “I got him.”

Even though he knew why Techno had held him back now, it didn’t make him any less upset at the man. The lingering anger in his chest sparked against seeing Techno’s impassive eyes behind his mask, and he had to hold himself back from saying something he knew he’d regret.

Techno stared him down for a beat, and apparently decided it wasn't worth the argument, because he held his hands up in mock surrender and took a step back. Readjusting the arm he had around Wilbur, Tommy guided him towards the car, and the two climbed over the back together to sit in the far back just like before.

The rest of the Syndicate watched silently as they left. Tommy could feel the questions burning in their eyes. Wondering what had happened, or why Tommy had panicked so much.

Tommy didn't care though. His brother was okay, and that's all he cared about for now.

The car pulled out onto the street, and the silence was a blessed relief from the way his head had been screaming earlier. Tommy absently began to play with Wilbur's fingers, uncurling them and curling them again, just so he had an excuse to remind himself that Wilbur's skin was warm and that he was still breathing.

Wilbur didn't seem to mind. If anything, he seemed to need the contact just as much as Tommy did, with a familiar glazed over look creeping into the corners of his eyes, but being held at bay by Tommy's grounding touch.

The car slowed to a stop once they found themselves back in Prime Heights. Phil and Techno climbed out of the car first, then lowered the seats for Wilbur and Tommy to follow them out as well. No one spoke as the group walked up to the front door, with Techno holding it open for the other three to step through.

As soon as the door clicked shut behind them though, finally, someone broke the silence.

"So obviously we need to talk about what happened with those hunters out there," Phil began, and Tommy's shoulders tensed, "but I think we can do that in the morning. Wil, Tommy, I'm sure you're both exhausted."

Letting out a sigh of relief, Tommy nodded in agreement.

"Do either of you guys need anything?" Phil then asked, glancing between the two of them with a barely there crease between his brows.

"I'm fine," Wilbur muttered. "Kinda just wanna go to bed."

Phil hummed, and then he spared one hesitant glance at Tommy before taking a step towards Wilbur. In a way, it almost made Tommy feel like he was Wilbur's guard dog, making everyone hesitant to even look at him for fear of what Tommy's reaction might be.

Reluctantly, Tommy let go of Wilbur's hand as Phil tugged him down for a hug. Tommy watched as Phil whispered something into Wilbur's ear, and Wilbur shook his head in response, making Phil smile ever so slightly.

Then, Techno was putting a hand on Wilbur's shoulder. Tommy didn't snap at him this time, a tiny bit of guilt sparked when he noticed the patchy blood stains on his sleeves from where Tommy had scratched up his arms. It was a little ironic that this was the second time he

clawed up the arms of someone who cared about him because they were trying to hold him back, and Tommy hated the way it made a lump lodge itself in his throat.

“Techno,” Tommy said softly, drawing all the attention in the room onto him. “Can I see your arms?”

Techno blinked, glancing down at the blood on his sleeves. “You didn’t hurt me that badly, Tommy.”

Huffing, Tommy stepped forward to grab Techno’s wrists, forcing his sleeves up and wincing when he saw the damage he caused. Thankfully, Techno’s long sleeves had mitigated most of the damage, but there were still angry red marks scorched up and down the pale skin of his forearms.

There was the humming warmth pooling in his palms, and Tommy realized that like with Punz, he could either push it onto Techno, or he could pull it away from him. Even though he wasn’t sure what pulling it away did, Tommy knew it wasn’t something good, so he ignored the urge to pull and instead began to push the warmth out from his palms and onto the parts of his fingers grabbing Techno’s wrists.

“No-”

“Techno, don’t fucking move,” Tommy hissed, tightening his grip on Techno’s wrists when he tried to pull away. “I need to do this.”

Unlike with Ranboo, who had accepted the healing, Techno’s frown only deepened. He was much stronger than Tommy, so it only took one yank for him to get his wrists out of Tommy’s grasp, and the warmth cut off so abruptly that Tommy almost gasped with the sudden iciness that enveloped his hands.

“No,” Techno repeated, bending down so he was eye to eye with Tommy. “You don’t need to heal me as an apology.”

“I can make it stop hurting though. I want to fix it,” Tommy said, narrowing his eyes at Techno. “Yeah, it sucks shit that my power hurts me, but I have a right to choose when I can deal with that pain. Besides, I’ve felt way worse than a few scratches.”

“So have I,” Techno shot back. “In case you forgot, I literally die and come back to life on a regular basis. Trust me, the scratches aren’t a big deal.”

Tommy clenched his jaw. “But I-”

“Apologies don’t have to be painful to be meaningful,” Phil chimed in from beside him, resting a hand on his shoulder. “Besides, I don’t think any of us really even blame you for what happened back there.”

“Phil’s right. You had a panic attack, and I kept you from hurting yourself. I’m not upset about that,” Techno agreed, tugging his sleeves back down. “Besides, just like you said you

have a choice about if you want to deal with the pain of healing someone, I also can choose if I don't want to be healed, capiche?"

...well, he had a point there.

Groaning, Tommy dropped his hands and stepped back. A warm arm threaded over his shoulders, and Tommy slumped into Wilbur's side.

"Both of you need to go get some sleep. You look like you're ready to pass out right here," Phil admonished, giving the two of them pointed looks.

Tommy wasn't going to argue with that. His head felt like it had been stuffed with cotton, and now that the last of his adrenaline spike had worn off, all he wanted to do was collapse onto something soft and not move for the next twelve hours.

"Night guys," Wilbur said, waving as he turned to head up the stairs with Tommy in tow. Tommy gave a weak wave of his own, and with that the two of them both hurried up the stairs, Wilbur's arm staying securely over his shoulders the entire time.

When they got to the top of the stairs, Wilbur immediately turned to the left instead of the right where Tommy's room was.

"Where are we going?" Tommy asked as Wilbur headed to the door that didn't lead to the room that silently called to him, but the one adjacent to it instead.

"My room," Wilbur answered.

There was no question about Tommy going back to his own room, and he was so relieved by that fact. He was still so shaken up from the fight, he didn't want to separate from Wilbur just yet, and it seemed like Wilbur felt the same way.

Wilbur's room was painfully familiar. Walls painted a warm shade of beige that were plastered with different band posters, bookshelves lined with books on political ideologies and philosophies, and a large bed that had the blankets so badly twisted around, Tommy wasn't sure which way the comforter was even supposed to lay.

Tommy remembered all the hours he'd spent in this room in the past, laying on Wilbur's bed while he played his songs or listened to him rant about whatever political book he was currently reading. He remembered sneaking in here when Wilbur was out to hide crudely drawn middle fingers in places like the pages of his books or under his pillow. Sometimes, on the nights he couldn't sleep because his head was just too damn loud, he'd snuck in here to crawl into bed with his brother. Even if he woke Wilbur up by accident, he'd never gotten upset, and usually would just throw the blankets over Tommy more before going back to sleep.

Damn, he'd missed this room a lot.

As the door clicked shut behind them, Wilbur dropped his arm from Tommy's shoulders, settling himself on the edge of his bed to untie his shoes. He kicked his boots across the

room, then carefully untied his mask, revealing the glittering makeup that had smeared a ridiculous amount since he had first applied it.

After a few seconds of hesitating in the doorway, Tommy followed suit. He untied his boots and then undid his mask, handing it to Wilbur who set it on his nightstand.

Then... they were both silent.

Their shoulders were pressed together, and Tommy spared a glance at Wilbur to see he was staring blankly at the wall. For a moment he wondered if Wilbur was drifting again, but even though there was the barest hint of something glazed over in his eyes, it was nothing close to what he was like the night Tommy had helped to ground him.

"Tonight was shit," Wilbur finally muttered after nearly three minutes of dead air.

Tommy huffed. "Yeah, it really was. You'd think the Syndicate meeting would've been the worst part, but then those fucking hunters had to show up."

"God, the meeting pissed me off so much," Wilbur groaned, dragging his hands down his face. "I just don't understand what they're even trying to do anymore. Like don't get me wrong, I'm pissed as hell at Dream for what he did, but I also know revenge won't really get us anywhere with him." He paused, tenting his fingers under his chin. "Sometimes I wonder if they all just want an excuse to hurt others."

This made Tommy wince, because he remembered when that was exactly what he wanted. He wanted an excuse to hurt the society that left him homeless, starved, and shoved under the thumb of people who didn't care about him. The rage burning inside of him desperately needed something to direct itself towards, and the Syndicate wanted to tear a gouge into the city itself. It was the perfect fit.

Wilbur had never been like that. He had always tried to come up with plans for stealth missions, things that would minimize the number of people who got hurt. There was a flame burning inside of him, but it wasn't out of anger. It was passion. A desire to see justice wrought on the corruption of the entire damn city.

"I think that's exactly what they want," Tommy muttered, picking at some blood stuck under his nails.

Blinking once, Wilbur rubbed at some of the makeup stuck under his eyes, and his fingers dropped back to his lap stained with black. "Remember the night I possessed Dream while you two were patrolling so I could talk to you?"

"Uh, yeah?" Tommy frowned, wondering why Wilbur was bringing that up.

"I think about that night a lot," Wilbur admitted. "I think about what you said to me, and how that made me think you couldn't be the one under that mask."

Tommy winced, remembering the harsh words he'd spat like acid under the glowing streetlights. "I didn't-"

“You don’t need to apologize. You were right,” Wilbur said, a sad smile flickering over his face. “You called me a monster, and that’s what I am. I hurt people, because that’s all I know how to do. Phil, Techno, and me—we only know how to tear things down. How to bring death. That’s what a monster does, right? Hurts and kills and destroys?”

“Wilbur, c’mon-”

“No, I’m not saying this to try and make you feel bad. I promise that’s not what I’m trying to do,” Wilbur said, his voice hoarse. “I just... it’s fucking ironic, I guess. I picked the name Orpheus because he was a musician who went to the underworld and came back just like I did. But Orpheus also lost someone he loved because of his flaws—because he was a coward who couldn’t help but glance behind him thanks to his own doubt, thus losing Eurydice permanently.”

He let out a quiet laugh, although there was nothing happy about the sound.

“I can’t stop looking back,” he whispered. “I’m never gonna get out of the Underworld because I can’t help but keep looking back, and so I just keep hurting people over and over again and-” he cut himself off with a shaky breath, and pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes. “Fuck, I’m sorry, I don’t know what I’m saying anymore.”

There was a beat of silence as Tommy stared at his brother, trying to figure out what to say to that. Seeing Wilbur breakdown like this hurt his chest in a way that made him feel as though he was being stabbed, because it was so unlike Wilbur to do this.

He knew Wilbur had his misgivings about being in the Syndicate but... this was different. This was *more*.

“You’re not a monster,” Tommy finally said after a moment.

Wilbur huffed. “Tommy, I told you, I’m not looking for an-”

“I don’t mean that as an apology.” Wilbur had his eyes on his lap, so Tommy reached over to grab his face, forcing Wilbur to meet his eyes as his own fingers became stained with black from the makeup on Wilbur’s cheeks. “You’re not a monster, Wilbur. I was wrong. You can’t simplify this shit into saying that people who hurt others are automatically monsters.”

“Monster, villain, bad person, call it whatever you like, but I’m not the good guy here,” Wilbur insisted. He tried to pull away, but Tommy held onto his face and refused to drop his hands.

“You’re not good, but you’re not a bad person either,” Tommy hissed, his own eyes welling up with frustrated tears. “Stop acting like it’s so fucking black and white, because if there’s one thing this whole amnesia bullshit has taught me, it’s that you can’t just say someone is good or evil. It doesn’t work like that.”

Wilbur frowned and opened his mouth again, but Tommy continued before he could speak.

“Am I a bad person, Wilbur?”

Surprise flashed over Wilbur's face. "Wh- No, of course not."

"I used to be part of the Syndicate. I wanted to burn shit down and hurt others more than you ever did, and I didn't give a single shit about killing others. By your definition, that'd make me a bad person."

"But... you're not like that anymore," Wilbur argued weakly.

"I hurt Techno tonight. Wouldn't that make me a bad person still?"

"You were just trying to protect me."

Tommy raised an eyebrow. "And what are you trying to do by staying in the Syndicate?"

Realization dawned on Wilbur's expression, but it was gone almost as quickly as it appeared. "Tommy, I get what you're trying to do but... I know what I'm like."

And the way he said that—defeat and acceptance dripping from his words with the finality of a funeral—it hurt Tommy so much more than he thought it would. It was such a simple explanation, one that told Tommy exactly what his brother thought of himself, and Tommy hated himself for ever thinking that Wilbur could be anything even close to a monster.

Dropping his hands from Wilbur's face, Tommy wrapped his arms around Wilbur's back and buried his face in his shoulder like he had earlier.

"You're such a fucking idiot," Tommy said, his voice muffled by Wilbur's jacket. "You're not a monster and I'm so goddamn pissed at myself for ever thinking you were."

"You were right though," Wilbur murmured, bringing a hand up to rest on the back of Tommy's head.

He wanted to argue it more. He wanted to scream at Wilbur that he wasn't a monster over and over until his idiot brother finally believed it, but he knew that wasn't going to be tonight. They were both exhausted, and Tommy could tell this was going to be something that took a lot more time to fix.

So he decided to let it go for now, and instead ask the other thing that had been nagging in the back of his mind since Wilbur had talked about Orpheus.

"What did you mean when you said you and Orpheus had both gone to the underworld and came back?" Tommy asked, pulling back.

Wilbur blinked, a small crease forming between his brows. "Oh, I forgot you wouldn't know about that." He pursed his lips, taking a breath like he was trying to figure out the best way to explain whatever he had meant by that.

He stared at Tommy for a moment, and then suddenly, he was laying back on the bed and pulling Tommy down with him. He readjusted so that Tommy's head was resting directly on his chest, and before Tommy could ask what he was doing, he began to speak.

“Listen to my heartbeat,” he said quietly, tracing circles into Tommy’s shoulder blade. “It’s not normal.”

Frowning, Tommy turned his head so his ear was pressed directly against Wilbur’s chest. He focused on the thumping coming from his heart, and quickly realized what his brother was talking about.

A normal heartbeat was a steady *thump thump thump*. Constant.

Wilbur’s was... not that. It was slow. Far too slow for a normal human’s heartbeat. More like a *thump* pause *thump* pause.

“What the fuck?” Tommy questioned, lifting his head to meet Wilbur’s eyes.

“It’s hard to explain, but I’m not technically alive,” Wilbur told him softly. “At least not fully.”

“The hell does that mean?”

“It means that I died once. When I was a kid, I got really sick. Phil took me to the hospital, and they kept testing stuff trying to figure out what the hell was wrong but nothing was turning up answers. Eventually, the hospital got the idea to do power testing and see if it was related to my powers, but there was so much bureaucratic tape bullshit you have to go through for stuff like that, I ended up dying before they were able to do anything.”

Tommy’s breath caught in his throat, but Wilbur kept going.

“I was dead for... well, it felt like a really long time. According to Phil, it wasn’t even a month since I died till he first started noticing weird shit happening in the house that he later figured out was me, but for me it felt like years before I got out of that fucking train station.”

“Train station?” Tommy asked, flashing back to that night on the rooftop when Dream used his fear landscape power on Wilbur.

Wilbur nodded. “My afterlife—or at least the afterlife I was stuck in—was a train station. It was completely empty except for me. I watched trains come and go, but they never stopped. I was just... I was trapped. I clawed at the walls, I screamed, I tried to find anyone else but it was only me.” His breathing hitched, but he kept going. “Then, one day I was just back. I was in my house, and Phil and Techno were there, but they couldn’t see me. And that’s when I realized I was a ghost.”

He paused, and Tommy reached out to grab the hand resting on his back. Wilbur tangled their fingers together, and Tommy squeezed his hand. Then, he kept going.

“Turns out, that’s how my powers came into effect. First I had to figure out how to be able to touch stuff, then I had to figure out how to make my voice heard, and eventually I was able to let Phil and Techno see me.”

“Wait, so it’s harder for you to be tangible than it is to be intangible?” Tommy asked.

"It used to be. I eventually got so used to it that now being tangible is my default state again, but that's why I start to flicker if I'm really stressed or something."

"And that's why the train station was the place you fear the most," Tommy continued, bile rising up in his throat. "The place you saw when Dream used his powers on you."

Wilbur laughed bitterly. "Yeah, that's it. Whenever I get too close to dying, I start to hear the trains and it freaks me the fuck out."

Tommy squeezed Wilbur's hand again. "Did you hear the trains again today?" He whispered. The too slow heartbeat under his ear stuttered.

"I did," Wilbur admitted. "They weren't as loud as I've heard them before, but they were definitely there. Though I have to admit, your screaming definitely helped me tune them out."

"Well, glad my great voice could help you out," Tommy said in an attempt at a joke, but it fell flat to the ground thanks to the shakiness in his tone. "So if you were to die again... would you come back as a ghost a second time?"

"I don't think so," Wilbur whispered, keeping his eyes on the ceiling. "Obviously I can't say for sure, but I just have a feeling I wouldn't come back from the train station a second time."

Tommy's heart skipped a beat at that. Just because Wilbur had gotten away from death once didn't mean it would happen again, and now that Tommy knew what torturous afterlife was waiting for his brother, it only made the coals smoldering in his chest burn hotter.

"You're not dying on my watch," Tommy told him.

Wilbur chuckled, and it actually sounded a bit genuine this time. "Just because you can heal doesn't mean you can control who lives or dies."

It didn't matter. Tommy wasn't going to lose his brother again. Even if he had no idea where he stood with the Syndicate, even if everything with Phil and Techno was so complicated it made his head hurt to even think about it, he knew that one thing.

Instead of saying that though, Tommy just buried his face in Wilbur's shirt again, his eyes growing heavy after the chaos of the day. Wilbur seemed to take the hint, because he reached over to turn out the lamp on his nightstand, and the entire room was plunged into darkness.

They were both still in their bloodied clothes and makeup was smeared over both of their faces, but Tommy sure as hell wasn't going to get up and take a shower right now, and it seemed Wilbur felt the same way.

Beneath him, he listened as Wilbur's breathing slowed down. It was a little terrifying how quiet his heartbeat was, but it was still there, and the fact that he had a heartbeat at all was enough to remind Tommy that he was okay.

When he was sure that Wilbur was asleep, Tommy found himself whispering out the last part of what he was going to say. The part he couldn't let Wilbur hear because he would realize that Tommy remembered him, but needed to say out loud. To make it a real promise to himself.

"I'm not mourning you twice in my life," Tommy whispered, the soft words hanging in the shadows on the walls. "I refuse to do that again."

And with that promise sealed, Tommy closed his eyes, and let himself drift off to sleep.

In the darkness, Tommy didn't see the way Wilbur's eyes fluttered at that.

Chapter End Notes

lmaoooo that didn't turn out like you guys expected now did it?

1) Punz ain't done, he's definitely gonna show back up at some point and 2) while I saw a few people mention the possibility of Purpled showing up, I'm glad no one caught onto the fact that Hannah hasn't showed up yet. I like to hc the bedwars crew as mercenaries a lot of the time, hence why Hannah popped up (and she'll definitely be back soon as well)

BUT WE AVOIDED DISASTER FOR NOW! I was writing this like goddamn how much hurt/comfort can I shove in here and the answer was a lot. hope you guys liked that part bc I loved writing all that good good stuff (and can you guys tell I have a soft spot for protective tommy?)

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! it was SO much fun for me to write, so please please let me know what you thought down in the comments below, I don't reply to most but I read them all and they really make my day <3

I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic or want the opportunity to ask me questions go check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I have a playlist for this fic and it's a banger! recommended listening off of it for this chapter, specifically the latter half, is 'everything I wanted' by billie eilish. I was listening to that on loop while I was writing that whole last scene. check out the playlist [here](#)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

no sugarcoating

Chapter Summary

Is a mess of memory fragments really a person?

Chapter Notes

hi hi everyone yes it's me again, your favorite author :D (/j of course... unless?)

anyway hello yes I am here to deliver more of my beloved hurt/comfort extravaganza to you all for your enjoyment. this chapter is definitely one of my favorites, so I'm super excited for you all to read it so I can see what you think

don't have much else to say so hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Surprisingly, after the near miss with the hunters at the Syndicate meeting, things went back to... normal?

Well, not entirely. The morning after everything that happened, Phil and Techno sat Wilbur and Tommy down and made the two of them go over every single detail about the hunters that they could remember. Wilbur had been pretty out of it by the time Hannah showed up, so it was mostly Tommy talking about her and Punz's interaction.

Suffice to say, it was troubling that Dream had given not one, but two hunters a bounty for Tommy, pitting them against each other to see which one could find him first. Not only were they likely in a competition against each other, but there was double the threat to Tommy then there would be otherwise.

Then there was also the issue of Punz reporting Tommy's dissent back to Dream. While a part of Tommy was terrified to think of what Dream might say when he found out Tommy didn't actually want to go back to him, another part of him couldn't really care any less.

He was still so conflicted about everything going on inside his head. Because now he knew Dream had lied to him about being kidnapped by the Syndicate. If anything, *Dream* was the one who kidnapped him, but he still couldn't even remember how he ended up with Dream in the first place. Hell, he didn't even know what caused his amnesia at all. Dream had told him he hit his head but... was that even true?

The picture was almost complete, but some of the most important puzzle pieces were still missing. It was driving him nuts.

Then there was also the issue of what he'd done with his powers during the fight with Punz. Tommy hadn't mentioned it to Phil, Techno, or Wilbur, even though he knew he probably should. It was just... something he didn't understand yet. He didn't even know what the hell the warmth he was pulling out of Punz had been, or why Punz had reacted so violently to it. While he knew the others could help him figure it out, he found himself hesitating every time he opened his mouth to mention it.

It was nagging at the back of his mind. Nagging in a way that told him that he *knew* what the warmth was, he knew what he had been doing, but it was part of his lost void of memories.

If he waited long enough, it would come back to him.

Hopefully.

His memories were simultaneously the easiest and most frustrating thing to deal with these days. At this point, Tommy was certain he had roughly seventy-five percent of his memories back, because with every conversation, every friendly interaction, every small thing like that, he realized he remembered more and more.

Tommy remembered the night Wilbur gave him the Syndicate name of Asphodel, and how pissed he'd been when he found out it was supposed to be a reference to the neutral afterlife in the Underworld. In pre-amnesia Tommy's mind, nothing about his stance with the Syndicate was neutral. He wanted to work with them. To protect them the same way they protected him. He wanted to have a hand in tearing down the government brick by brick, until his nails were caked with dirt and his hands were stained with blood.

But Wilbur had insisted he keep the name Asphodel until he turned eighteen. To remain neutral until he was 'officially' an adult, and could be fully aware of the ramifications that came with picking a side.

Tommy remembered going over Greek names with Techno late into the night, heads bowed over one of Techno's mythology books as they worked to pick out what Tommy's official Syndicate name would be once he graduated from 'Asphodel'.

As far as Tommy knew, they never settled on what his new name was going to be. He could only imagine that was because he got kidnapped before he found one he liked.

Something that surprised Tommy as more of his memories came back was the fact that he spent far more time with Techno than he had first realized. A tradition they had started only in the latter half of Tommy's stay with the family was when they would spend late evenings reading together. Growing up, Tommy thought reading was a waste of time when he had far more important things to focus on. But with Techno, that had changed.

"Is that another book from my room you stole?" Techno asked one evening, setting down a steaming cup of tea next to the chair Tommy was curled up in.

“Nope, definitely not,” Tommy lied, smiling sweetly at his brother. “Thanks for the tea by the way,” he added, reaching out to take a sip from the cup.

Techno grunted as an acknowledgement of the thanks, and sat himself down on the couch beside Tommy’s chair. “Really? Because that looks exactly like my extremely rare, fifty year old copy of Machiavelli’s ‘The Prince’.”

“Must be a weird coincidence then, because this is definitely my copy,” Tommy huffed, pointedly looking back down at the pages in front of him.

“Why are you reading that anyway? I thought you liked the mythology stuff more than political philosophy,” Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I dunno, you always talk about government and quote the ‘Art of War’ or whatever, so I thought maybe I should read up on that stuff for when I can start actually doing shit in the Syndicate,” Tommy shrugged. “I wanna be able to understand what the hell we’re talking about, y’know?”

There was a beat of silence as Techno stared at him, his expression unreadable. But if Tommy had to take a guess, he’d almost say there was something like... pride in his eyes?

It was gone as quickly as it appeared, Techno coughing and glancing away. “Well, we don’t exactly use Machiavelli as our basis for our anarchy, but he does have some good points about dealing with enemies. Has any line in particular caught your eye?”

Nodding, Tommy flipped back a few pages to find the line he’d noticed earlier. “Yeah, actually! This one I really liked reads, ‘The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.’”

Techno huffed in what seemed like approval, and Tommy preened under the silent praise. “And what do you think you are, Tommy? Are you a fox, a lion, or are you both?”

Tommy hadn’t been sure what he was at the time, and he still didn’t know now.

So many things had filtered back into his mind without him even realizing it. Techno, Phil, Tubbo, Ranboo, Niki, Jack, Puffy, Sam, Ponk—hell, he even remembered hanging out with Quackity and his crew at Las Nevadas!

Tommy had once had a life with these people. He had been accepted by them. He had *loved* them. And a part of him still did.

But even with so many of his memories back, Tommy still didn’t feel like the person he had once been. Sometimes he did, when his anger flared up he remembered the side of himself that wanted to join the Syndicate so desperately, the part that wanted to learn how to be both a lion and a fox. But then he would think of the horror he felt that night when Phil blew the building up, or when Techno stabbed Dream, or when Jack put him through that horrible pain.

Tommy had probably described his mind as complicated a thousand times already, but there was no better word for it. He didn't feel like a person anymore. Instead, he was a collage of mismatched pictures. A colorful mess of memory fragments and confusing emotions that were combining into two different pictures.

If there was any consolation from all of this though, at least he had Wilbur.

Wilbur was the only person who things weren't complicated with. Wilbur was... well, he was *Wilbur*. The one who seemed to understand what he was going through better than anyone else around him. The one who was just as conflicted as he was about his place in the Syndicate.

There was something off about Wilbur lately though. It wasn't anything blatant, but sometimes Tommy would notice Wilbur staring at him for a beat too long with a crease formed between his brows. Or Wilbur would open his mouth like he was going to ask Tommy a question, but would change his mind at the last second.

While Tommy tried not to worry about it, it nagged at his mind like the lingering sting from a mosquito bite. He told himself that it probably had nothing to do with him, or if it did, Wilbur would ask him about it eventually.

But a part of him couldn't help but wonder if Wilbur was thinking the same thing that Phil and Techno had made so obvious. How they wanted the old Tommy back. Maybe the incident with Punz had reminded Wilbur of how Tommy used to be, or maybe it was the exact opposite and it made him realize how Tommy so clearly *wasn't* the same brother he used to have. Whichever one it was though, Tommy couldn't help but let the anxiety fester in his mind, telling him that Wilbur was disappointed in him just like everyone else was.

Tommy could've asked Wilbur about it.

Instead, he found himself talking to Tubbo and Ranboo.

It was three days after the incident with Punz, and Tommy hadn't been allowed out of the house since. The entire house was on edge, waiting for the day Punz tracked them down and tried to take Tommy out from under their noses. Techno paced the halls, Phil stayed up all through the night, and Wilbur was hovering even more so than he usually did.

So it was a relief when Tubbo and Ranboo showed up at the front door, asking Tommy if he wanted to hang out for a bit. They hadn't seen each other since the Syndicate meeting, and while Tommy was bothered by the way Tubbo had jumped on the train of wanting revenge on Dream, he was grateful for the distraction from the nervous energy in the house.

"Y'know, you really freaked us out the other night," Tubbo had told him point blank as soon as they'd gotten to his room. "Like, you were absolutely losing your shit over Wilbur being hurt."

Tommy huffed as he fell back onto his bed, gaze darting around the dips and bumps along the ceiling. "I didn't know Aeacus was a healer, so I panicked because I thought he was gonna die."

"Techno told you they were a healer," Ranboo said, fiddling with his hands in his lap. "I don't think you heard him though."

Wincing, Tommy scooted to the side as he felt Tubbo sit up on the bed beside him. "No, I guess I didn't hear that."

There was a beat of silence as the sheets rustled beneath them, Ranboo delicately settling himself next to Tubbo and making the mattress squeak under their combined weight. Rolling over, Tommy watched as Tubbo and Ranboo both stretched out so that all three of them were laying side by side.

Tubbo glanced between both him and Ranboo. Then, he seemed to make a silent decision, and his gaze locked onto Tommy's.

"It was kind of weird to see you like that," Tubbo admitted, thick blonde strands of hair falling over his eyebrows.

"Because you're not used to seeing me that pissed or panicked?"

Tubbo shook his head. "Actually, it's kind of the opposite. Admittedly, you were more panicked than you used to get, but I haven't seen you look that angry about something since... well, since before you lost your memories." On Tubbo's other side, Ranboo hummed in agreement.

Something solid lodged itself into Tommy's throat. He tried to swallow it down, but it wouldn't budge.

While he had known the anger flowing through his veins that night had belonged to the old Tommy, he hadn't thought that anyone else would notice. But he should've known better. Of course the others would notice.

There was something else in Tubbo's words that made Tommy's chest ache though. It was a quiet sort of sadness he heard. Tubbo wasn't a very emotional person, so he wouldn't outright say it, but the tiny dips in his voice told Tommy that seeing Tommy like that had upset him. And Tommy had a feeling he knew why that was.

"Do... Do you miss him?" Tommy whispered.

Tubbo turned his head so their eyes met, while Ranboo propped himself up on his elbow so he could also look at Tommy.

"Miss who?" Tubbo asked.

"Tommy," Tommy said, clenching his jaw. "The old Tommy. Your best friend."

"I don't understand. You're right here," Tubbo pointed out, frowning at him.

Suddenly, Ranboo was reaching over to place a hand on Tubbo's shoulder. "I think I get what he means," Ranboo said, shifting so they were sitting in something closer to a half circle. "He's asking if we miss the person he used to be before the amnesia."

Tommy nodded to confirm, and Tubbo made a noise of understanding as Ranboo dropped his hand again.

“I mean, that’s a pretty hard fucking question, bossman.”

“It- It’s okay if you do,” Tommy said, wincing again at the way he tripped over his words. “I’m not gonna be, like, offended or anything. I know I act differently than he did.”

Tubbo immediately shook his head. “No, I don’t mean it’s hard because I wanna sugarcoat it or any bullshit like that. It’s hard because the answer is really hard to put into words.”

“Can you just try for me?” Tommy pushed, ignoring the way anxiety was crawling up his throat again. “Please?”

“Um, I can try first while Tubbo thinks of how to word his answer,” Ranboo volunteered. Tommy nodded at him to go on, and he cleared his throat as he tucked a strand of grey hair behind his ear. “So, like, it’s hard, right? Because you’re right when you say you don’t act like the other Tommy did.”

“You’re a lot less bitchy for one thing,” Tubbo chimed in.

Ranboo snorted. “Yeah, that’s one way to put it. You’re a lot, uh, nicer than you used to be. But it’s also still you. You still make the same jokes, talk about the same stuff, have the same sense of humor—and a lot of the time I forget about your amnesia because it just feels like how it used to feel between all of us.” He paused, mismatched eyes flickering down to his lap. “But, um, then sometimes it doesn’t feel the same. Like obviously when the Syndicate gets brought up, it definitely, uh, feels different.”

“You feel like a complete stranger when you talk about how much you hate villains or the Syndicate or whatever,” Tubbo continued, his blunt words chopping Ranboo’s hesitation in half.

“Tubbo!” Ranboo hissed, swatting his arm.

“I’m not gonna fucking sugarcoat it! He’s not an idiot!” Tubbo shot back, elbowing Ranboo’s side. “It’s weird because sometimes you sound like someone I’ve never met before when you get all pissy about the Syndicate, but then other times you *don’t* which is even more confusing. Like you’ll say shit that the old Tommy never would’ve said, but you say it in the same way he used to talk about how much he hated L’Manberg or whatever.”

Tommy frowned, turning back to look at the ceiling. “You haven’t answered my question though. Do you *miss* him?”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you. I don’t know how to answer that,” Tubbo explained. “Because you’re right here, I can’t exactly miss someone who’s right in front of my face, but also I *do* sometimes and it doesn’t make any sense!” He paused, taking a deep breath and pushing his hair out of his eyes. “I guess a way to say it is that I don’t miss you as a person because you’re here, but I miss certain things about the way we all used to be. Like, I miss when we could make fucked up jokes about blowing up the city and you would laugh at

them. I miss being able to go over our plans for when we all turned eighteen and all the shit we'd wreck. Hell, I miss not having to walk on fucking eggshells every time I talk to you, because I think if I slipup and say how much I would love to blow the entire fucking Hero Tower sky high you'll suddenly hate me!"

Sitting up at this, Tommy whipped his head back over to his friends. Tubbo was breathing heavily, like he'd just run a marathon. Meanwhile, Ranboo was groaning with his face buried in his hands.

"You don't need to walk on eggshells around me," Tommy snapped without thinking. "I know who you are and what you do. You saying you want to blow up the Hero Tower isn't a goddamn surprise."

"Are you sure about that? Or are you just saying that and silently judging me anyway?" Tubbo challenged. "I don't even understand why the hell you care so much about L'Manberg! This city has done nothing but hurt you, me, Ranboo, and every other fucking person in it. The Heroes are fucking useless, the government is shit, and-"

"Not everyone who lives in L'Manberg is responsible for that shit though!" Tommy said, cutting Tubbo off. "Why the hell should people who had nothing to do with making the city this way get hurt because of how much you hate the system?"

"They shouldn't, but sometimes casualties are an unavoidable fact of war."

"This isn't a war you *need* to fight though! Is it really worth it to hurt innocents in the name of possibly changing-"

"Look, Tommy," Tubbo cut in, "I'm gonna say something you really won't like to hear, but I'm kind of sick of going around in circles with this."

Raising an eyebrow, Tommy folded his arms over his chest. "Fine. What is it?"

"Tubbo, maybe it's not a good idea to tell him-"

"Ranboo, let me talk," Tubbo snapped, shooting a glare over his shoulder before facing Tommy again. "Frankly, I don't give a shit about innocent people who get hurt in the crossfire of all this. Yeah, it sucks and I'm not gonna go out of my way to hurt innocents, but I don't know those people, so if they die that's really not my fucking problem. No one cared when Ranboo and I were hurt over and over again, just like no one cared when you were hurt too. Caring about strangers gets you nowhere, and I miss the time when you wouldn't judge me for saying something like that."

Tommy gaped at Tubbo. What he said lined up with all of the memories Tommy had gained back of Tubbo in his head, but it was still different to hear Tubbo say what he really thought to his face.

Tubbo... Tubbo had always been like that though. Practical to a fault, relying on logic and reason instead of emotions. He wasn't needlessly cruel, but he didn't see a point in crying over spilled milk. For him, there was no reason to get upset over the deaths of a few civilians

because he didn't know them. They had no connection to him, so it didn't affect him in any real way.

It made sense. Tommy knew it made sense, and he understood the logic behind it all because that was similar to how Tommy used to think too.

But Tommy hadn't relied on logical reasoning for his lack of empathy towards the rest of the city. Instead, it was his anger that blinded him to caring. He had a bone to pick with the world and he didn't care who got caught in the bite.

Tommy was still angry in a lot of ways, and it was getting worse by the day. The more memories he regained, the hotter that fire would burn. But at the same time, he didn't direct any of that anger to the city itself. Instead, that anger was for everything and nothing at the same time.

Anger towards the Syndicate for blowing that building up. Anger towards Punz for stabbing Wilbur. Anger towards Dream for taking him away from his family and telling him his brother was dead.

...anger towards himself. Towards the two warring sides in his mind.

"It would be so much easier if I was him," Tommy whispered, mostly to himself but still loud enough for Tubbo and Ranboo to hear. "I don't want to be like this. It would be so much goddamn easier if I could stop caring about people I don't know, but I do and I don't know how to shut it off."

There was a beat of silence as Tubbo and Ranboo both stared at him, unsure of what to say.

Then,

"Well, when you get your memories back, you probably won't think like that anymore," Ranboo said weakly, trying to be supportive.

Except hearing that was like a dagger being shoved straight into Tommy's chest. Because that was the problem. He remembered *so much* now, but he was only more confused than he'd ever been before.

Choking back a pained gasp, Tommy pulled his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around himself as tight as he could.

"Can- Can you guys leave?" He asked, taking a few stuttered breaths.

"I mean, are you sure?" Ranboo asked, reaching out to put a hand on his knee. "We can change the subject if you want, or-"

"Please leave me alone," Tommy repeated, his voice stronger this time. "I just can't be around you two right now."

A horrible, suffocating silence smothered the air between them at that. Tubbo and Ranboo exchanged nervous looks, before Tubbo reluctantly slid off the bed with Ranboo following

suit.

They both walked to the door with painful slowness, Tubbo hesitating as he put his hand on the doorknob. For a moment, Tommy wondered if he was going to say something, watching from the corner of his eye as Tubbo's eyes lingered on him.

But then the moment passed, and Tubbo pulled open the door. He walked out, with Ranboo giving Tommy a small wave before he let it shut behind him.

As soon as they were gone, Tommy breathed a sigh of relief and fell back against his bedsheets. Bringing his hands up to his face, he pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes until pink stars exploded across the backs of his eyelids.

He hated this. He hated all of this so goddamn much. He hated this hole he'd dug himself into by lying about his returning memories. He hated the way everyone expected him to just go back to the way he was like nothing had ever happened. He hated the fear he had that he was going to be a disappointment no matter what happened.

He hated Dream for doing this to him. For turning everything in his life upside down and making his own mind a hostile place to himself.

Tommy wanted to remember more, but didn't at the same time. He wanted- no, he *needed* answers, or else he was going to go insane. If he got all his memories back, maybe he would have those answers, but he might also just end up even more messed up than he already was.

Bleary-eyed, Tommy stumbled off his bed and opened the door to his room. Tubbo and Ranboo were gone, and considering he couldn't even hear the quiet murmur of voices coming from downstairs, he figured the two had left the house entirely.

That was a relief. Tommy really didn't think he could handle talking to either of them anymore than he already had today.

He wandered down the hallway, fingers trailing over the macabre paintings that lined the walls. Phil had painted them, saying they were inspired by a woman dressed in all black he claimed to see in his dreams. Sometimes, he even mused that he might've known her in another life.

At the time, Tommy had thought he was crazy, but now he thought he understood. When flashes of someone kept appearing in your mind but you couldn't remember their face, their voice, their smile—it was enough to drive you mad wanting to understand who you were seeing. Tommy could see how Phil's paintings might've been his way of bringing the ghost of that dream into the waking world, to make her *real*.

Without even thinking about it, Tommy's feet carried him in front of the door. The one across from the stairs that had always called to Tommy. The one that hadn't been opened in his entire time staying at the house.

His arm lifted of its own accord. The metal of the doorknob was cool against his palm, and when Tommy twisted it, his breath caught in his throat.

Then, before he could let himself back out of it, he pushed the door open.

His old room looked exactly the same as it did in his memories. Off white walls, video game posters on the walls, bright red comforter thrown over the bed—it felt just... right stepping inside of it. But at the same time, it was so unfamiliar to him. Almost as if he was walking into a perfect dollhouse replica of a place he'd once known.

Leaving the door open just a crack behind him, Tommy looked around, hands fluttering uselessly at his sides as he tried to push the nervous energy buzzing in his mind away. He walked over to the bed, running his hands over the smoothed out comforter, wondering if Phil had made his bed for him while he was gone.

Eyes drifting up to the headboard, Tommy furrowed his brows when he noticed a plush toy cow shoved in between two pillows.

Henry, his mind supplied for him.

Henry had been a gift from Phil, one of the first things he'd given Tommy when he came to live with them. The four of them had gone to a carnival, and when they had come across one of those definitely rigged carnival games, Tommy spotted Henry sitting on the top shelf and begged Phil to let him try to win it.

The thing was, Tommy had never had stuffed animals growing up. Even though he knew it was silly, cows were his favorite animal, and as a kid he always thought if he ever got to ask for a stuffed animal toy, he would want a cow.

Seeing Henry at the carnival had felt like fate. So he picked up the wooden rings, and tried his best to get the silly toy.

In the end, he failed spectacularly. While he didn't ask Phil for a second try, Wilbur took it upon himself to try again to win the cow for Tommy. The thing was, Wilbur had even worse hand eye coordination than Tommy did, so he also failed.

Techno stepped in after that. Even though Tommy insisted he was fine and didn't need it that badly, Techno told him that he wanted to try it and see if the game was rigged. When Techno also failed, he declared it was definitely rigged, shouting so loudly that the attendant got nervous and offered them another try for free.

At this point, Phil was the only one who hadn't tried the game yet. While Tommy didn't have high hopes, somehow Phil landed the ring on the first try, and Tommy had almost wanted to cry when Phil handed him the plush toy with a beaming smile

The attendant working the game referred to them as a family at one point, and no one bothered to correct him. That was the first time Tommy didn't think of Phil and Techno as Wilbur's family, but instead thought they could all be a family together.

Hugging Henry close to his chest, Tommy sat down on the edge of the bed, breathing in the familiar scent of fabric softener on the cow's head. The memory of the carnival wasn't something that should be painful, but it made his chest ache to even imagine it.

His returned memories were now a reminder of a life he'd once had, but he wasn't sure if he could ever get back again. The days where he could simply enjoy his time with his family were gone because everything was far too complicated, but he *missed* it all so much. He missed when things were simple. When he could be okay with who he was and who his family was and all the things they did.

Maybe it was selfish of him to wish he didn't care as much as he did. But being selfish paled in comparison to the way he used to be.

A knock on the door startled him out of his thoughts. Whipping his head up, Tommy remembered he'd left the door partly open, and his eyes widened when he saw Wilbur peeking his head into the room.

"Hey there," Wilbur said softly when Tommy caught his eye. "Can I come in?"

Clenching his jaw, Tommy nodded, and Wilbur phased through the door before solidifying again to completely shut it behind him. Then, he padded over to the bed, sitting down right next to Tommy so their shoulders were brushing.

"Can I ask you something?" Wilbur asked as soon as he was settled.

Reluctantly, Tommy nodded again.

There was a beat of silence as Wilbur folded his hands in his lap. Tommy waited for him to ask what he was doing in here. Or to ask if he knew what this room was. Because there was no reason Tommy should know what this room was. He wasn't supposed to remember it, just like he wasn't supposed to remember the carnival, or Henry, or any of the other hundreds of memories he'd gotten back.

Wilbur didn't ask any of that.

He took a breath before looking up at Tommy. Then,

"When... When did you first start remembering?"

The question sent Tommy's heart plummeting into his stomach. He stiffened as if an electric shock had run through him, squeezing Henry so tightly he was afraid his stuffing might pop out of his seams.

It wasn't a question of *if* he started remembering. It was a *when*.

"I- I haven't remembered anything," Tommy stammered, blood rushing in his ears. "I've told you guys that. I have- you know, I have, like, feelings but I don't have any actual memories."

Wilbur couldn't know he remembered. If he knew Tommy had his memories back, he would want to know why Tommy wasn't the same as he was. He would tell Phil and Techno, and they would realize this wasn't *their* Tommy. This wasn't the boy they loved, and he might not ever come back to them.

There was no surprise from Wilbur at his answer. Instead, his smile faded, and he turned so he was fully facing Tommy.

"You're lying," he told him, no judgement or anger lining his words. "The other night after that thing with Punz, when we were both falling asleep, you said you didn't want to mourn me twice. Earlier you'd also said something about not wanting to lose me again. The only other time I can think of you mourning me would be when Dream told you the Syndicate killed your brother. The one you told Phil had brown hair, who liked music and was a singer."

Shit. Fuck. He'd heard Tommy say that. He'd been awake and Tommy hadn't even realized. No no no-

"I don't- I don't know what you're talking about," Tommy lied, his breathing having turned to stuttering gasps. "I don't remember you. I don't remember anything."

"You do though," Wilbur insisted, reaching out to put both his hands on Tommy's shoulders. "I know you do. You were *so* panicked when Punz stabbed me. You wouldn't have freaked out that much for someone you didn't remember."

"I don't," Tommy whispered, tears welling up in his eyes because Wilbur knew, he knew and he was going to hate Tommy for lying to him and this was it it was over-

Pulling on his shoulders, Wilbur leaned closer and Tommy mirrored him till their foreheads were bumping.

"Why are you lying to me?" Wilbur whispered, his voice cracking. "I know you remember me. I can see it in your eyes."

And-

And Tommy couldn't do this anymore.

Wilbur knew him too well. His dark gaze pierced straight through Tommy, revealing all of his secrets and making him feel so utterly exposed. He knew that Tommy remembered. He knew, and Tommy was *so so* exhausted from trying to hide it any longer.

Why was he lying?

"Because I'm still not *him!*" Tommy sobbed, tears spilling down his cheeks as Henry fell from his lap and onto the floor. "Even though I remember being him, I don't think like him, I don't view things the same way he did, and I- I just- I'm not the same!"

He cut himself off, hiccuping between his sobs as he squeezed his eyes shut.

"How much do you remember?" Wilbur asked, his voice wavering.

"Almost everything," Tommy confessed, the dam inside his chest bursting as his floodwater of emotion came rushing out. "I don't- I don't remember how Dream kidnapped me, or how he made me forget everything. But I remember you guys. I remember going to the carnival to

get Henry, I remember reading books late at night with Techno, I remember gardening with Phil, I remember when you chose the name Asphodel for me, I- I remember-”

“Tommy,” Wilbur cut him off. “Breathe. It’s okay.”

Sucking in a desperate breath, Tommy tried to steady himself, but his chest was heaving in an almost painful way. “I- I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so fucking-”

“Tommy, what are you apologizing for? For not telling me about your memories?”

Tommy shook his head. “I’m sorry that- that I’m not your brother,” he sobbed. “I thought getting my memories back would help but they just make things so much worse. I’m not like him, and I know you want him back and I didn’t want to give you false hope that I would be him again which is why I didn’t want to say I was getting my memories back and- and-”

Suddenly, warm arms were pulling him close, and Tommy latched onto his brother like he was drowning. He buried his face in Wilbur’s shoulder, crying muffled and tears staining the fabric of his sweater.

“I told you at Las Nevadas that I didn’t care how you acted, you were still my little brother and that hasn’t changed,” Wilbur whispered into his hair, and Tommy felt tears hitting the top of his head.

“But you said I was your brother even if I didn’t remember it. I do remember it though. I remember it and I’m still not your Tommy.”

Wilbur squeezed the arms around Tommy’s back, like Tommy would disintegrate into dust if he let go.

“Do- Do you think of me as your brother?” Wilbur asked hoarsely. “Do you not want us to be a family anymore?”

Tommy almost choked at the question. “Of course you’re my brother! But I’m not *your* brother. It’s not fair to ask you to be my family when I’m not him.” *It’s not fair to expect you to love a stranger,* went unsaid, but Tommy had a feeling Wilbur heard it loud and clear anyway.

At this, Wilbur’s shoulders slumped, like he was a balloon air was leaking out of. His hold on Tommy loosened—not enough to make him drop his arms, but to the point where he wasn’t squeezing Tommy half to death anymore.

“You’re wrong,” Wilbur told him, resting his chin on top of Tommy’s head. “Yes, you’re not the same person you once were, but that doesn’t mean you’re someone else entirely.”

Tommy shook his head. “I feel so disconnected from him in so many ways. I have his memories but he was so... angry. And I’m angry too, but not for the same reasons. Not in the same ways.”

There was a beat of silence as Tommy’s breathing began to slow, and Wilbur ran his hands through Tommy’s hair. He readjusted himself so he wasn’t smashing his nose into Wilbur’s

shoulder, and once he'd gotten comfortable again, Wilbur spoke.

"You know, I wasn't the same after I came back from the train station," Wilbur confessed, absently rubbing circles into Tommy's shoulder. "Even after I'd figured out how to be tangible again, how to act like a normal kid again with a heartbeat and color in my cheeks and all that... I wondered if I was even the same Wilbur who had died in Phil's arms, or if I was some cheap imitation that the train station created to replace him."

Pulling back so he could meet Wilbur's eyes, Tommy frowned. "Wait, for real?"

Wilbur nodded. "Yeah, really. I was a lot quieter after I came back from the train station, and Techno said I was way more sensitive." He chuckled a bit at that, although it was weak. "I think it balanced out eventually, because after a few years I started acting more like my old self again, but I never fully went back to 'normal'."

"I just... sometimes I feel so disconnected from my memories. It's like looking—"

"Through a stranger's eyes?" Wilbur suggested, raising an eyebrow. Tommy nodded, and Wilbur hummed softly. "It's like that for me too, even though it's probably not the same since I didn't experience any amnesia- well, not anything major like you. I definitely forgot bits and pieces, but even though I still had the majority of my memories of my life before, there was something off about it. Something that had changed inside of me that I was never going to be able to undo."

"That's exactly it," Tommy whispered, nodding to himself. "It's shifted. Something inside of me moved and I can't figure out how to put it back into place."

Wilbur was quiet for a moment.

"You know how sometimes people say a ghost is a wisp of a broken memory, or some attempt at an imitation of a living person, but it can never match up to the person it's meant to be?" Wilbur asked, tilting Tommy's chin up so they were eye to eye.

"Yeah, I guess so."

That sad smile was back, and Tommy watched a tear roll down Wilbur's cheek. "I think you're a living ghost, Tommy. Like me."

A living ghost. A warped reflection of the old Tommy. He looked like the same person on the surface, but take even one step too close, and you'd be able to look right through him.

"I'm so fucking sorry you've had to deal with this for so long on your own," Wilbur continued after a moment, the smile disappearing once more. "I've been wondering if you were lying to us about remembering for so long but I just- I didn't want to push."

"It's okay," Tommy whispered, bumping his forehead into Wilbur's chest. "I probably would've flipped out if you confronted me about this a few weeks ago."

Humming, Wilbur tugged him closer, shifting so they were both lying against the pillows at the head of his bed. Tommy was curled into Wilbur's side, and Wilbur had an arm wrapped

around his shoulder, his hand absently playing with the ends of Tommy's curls.

Tommy was exhausted. His tears had dried, but his chest ached and his eyes stung from being all swollen. He felt so drained from the past few minutes, all he wanted to do was bury his head in Wilbur's shoulder and never face the world again.

"You never answered my original question," Wilbur said after a few minutes of silence.
"When did you first start remembering?"

"Um, I got my first memory back the third time Tubbo and Ranboo came over," Tommy told him, picking at the loose threads on Wilbur's sweater. "We got into a stupid argument, and it made me remember another stupid argument we'd had a while back."

Wilbur made a wounded noise. "You've remembered for that long?"

"It wasn't all at once," Tommy explained. "At first it was just that one memory, and then things gradually started coming back. It was super slow in the beginning, with most of what I was getting back just being vague flashes or emotions. I'd say the next big thing was that even though I still couldn't see the face of the brother I knew I had at one point, I remembered his voice, and I was really fucking pissed when I realized it was your voice."

He paused, and Wilbur didn't say anything, waiting for him to go on.

"It was hard, because a part of me knew you were the brother I was remembering. But I didn't want to admit that to myself. Plus Dream had told me my brother was probably dead, so I kept shoving it down and tried to find other stupid explanations for everything. Then there was the whole thing where I helped to ground you, and I remembered all the times I'd done that before."

"I asked you that night if you remembered," Wilbur murmured.

Tommy winced. "You did, and I was still so freaked out by what I was remembering that I wanted time to process them. I didn't want to deal with everyone asking me questions when I barely understood my memories, so I just lied."

"I get that," Wilbur said, twisting one of Tommy's curls around his finger. "I wouldn't want to deal with all those questions either. Not if I was that confused about everything."

Fucking Wilbur, being so stupidly understanding even when Tommy admitted how much he'd lied to him.

"Las Nevadas was when I actually, like, made the full connection between you and the brother in my memories," Tommy said, focusing very intently on the sweater strands he was tugging at instead of meeting Wilbur's eyes. "I also remembered a lot of other stuff at that point. Stuff about Phil and Techno, and stuff about me as Asphodel once Charlie said my name. But yeah, that was when I really remembered who you were. And after that things just kind of... kept going."

"You know Charlie's name?" Wilbur questioned.

Tommy huffed, having said Fides' real name without even realizing it. "I guess I do now. A lot of my memories come back like that. They just slip into my head like they've always been there."

"But you still don't know how Dream got ahold of you? Or how you lost your memories?"

"No, I don't. That's the most frustrating part of all. I just wanna know what the hell happened to me." His breathing hitched, and he tried to shove down another round of tears already burning behind his eyes. "I just hate this so fucking much. I hate not knowing who I am, whether I'm fucking Asphodel or Lucid or whatever—I feel like I'm being torn in half and all I can do is sit and wait for it to get worse."

Underneath him, Wilbur shifted until Tommy's head was being forced up again, and met Wilbur's narrowed eyes.

"You know who you are," Wilbur told him in a low voice, the kind of tone that didn't leave room for argument. "First and foremost, you're Tommy. And maybe you don't know what that means yet, but that's okay. You don't need to try and be more like one version of yourself or another. You're *you*, and that's all that matters."

Blinking quickly to try and dispel the tears gathering in his eyes, Tommy nodded. "Okay," he whispered. "So you're not disappointed I'm not the same?"

Horror flashed across Wilbur's face as he shook his head. "Wh- No, of course I'm not disappointed! You're here, you're okay, and you don't hate me even when you have every right to. How the hell could I be disappointed with that?"

Warm relief swept through Tommy's aching chest like a balm, and he buried his face into Wilbur's chest again when he felt his eyes burn even more.

"I love you, Wil," Tommy whispered.

Wilbur huffed. "Now who's the sappy one?" He teased, although Tommy could tell he was sniffling a bit.

"Fuck off, we're having an emotional moment," Tommy chuckled, lightly punching Wilbur's arm.

"Well, if we wanna make it more emotional we can reminisce," Wilbur said, dropping his hand to rest on the back of Tommy's head. "Do you remember how we first met?"

Tommy snorted as the memory flashed through his mind. "I tried to mug you."

"You did! And you were fucking awful at it!"

"Oh fuck you, I was definitely at least a little intimidating! How the hell was I supposed to know the stupid fucker I'd chosen to rob had ghost powers?" Tommy scoffed, propping his chin up so he could meet Wilbur's eyes.

"I think even if I wasn't able to turn intangible I wouldn't have been that scared. That knife you used was so dull, it probably wouldn't have been able to cut through butter," Wilbur huffed, smirking at him. "Plus, your hands were shaking so badly, even if it was sharp I bet you would've dropped the damn thing."

Tommy frowned. "You're such a bitch. My hands were only shaking because I hadn't eaten in, like, two whole days. Plus, it was my first time trying to mug someone!"

"So you think you would've gotten better if I hadn't gone and bought you a sandwich?" Wilbur asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh definitely. I would've become the most fearsome mugger around. Knife Man is what they would've called me. They all would've thought I had amazing knife powers because of how cool and skilled I was with my knife!"

Wilbur let out a barking laugh at that. "Knife Man, very intimidating name indeed," he mused, still grinning at Tommy. "Though, you gotta admit, letting me buy you a sandwich turned out to be a much better deal instead, don't you think?"

"I mean, I definitely second-guessed accepting that sandwich when you started showing up to bug me every goddamn day after that," Tommy muttered, although he was smiling too. "I guess I'd say it was worth it though."

"Because then that led to you eventually getting to try Techno's mashed potatoes," Wilbur pointed out.

Tommy chuckled. "Yeah, exactly. The potatoes made it all worth it in the end."

They were both grinning widely now, and Tommy couldn't remember the last time his chest had felt so light. Yeah, he was still confused about a lot of things, and he was going to have to ask Wilbur not to tell Phil or Techno he remembered because he knew that they wouldn't be as understanding as Wilbur was. But at this moment, Tommy felt more at peace than he had in a long time.

And staring up at his best friend, at his *brother* who understood him better than anyone else in the world seemed to be able to, Tommy admitted something else that had been sitting on the tip of his tongue for ages.

"I missed you."

Wilbur's smile softened, and he leaned forward, pressing his face into the top of Tommy's head.

"I missed you too," he whispered, chapped lips pressing a featherlight kiss into his hair.

For a moment, everything felt like it was okay.

For a moment, the war inside Tommy's head fell quiet.

For a moment, Tommy understood what Wilbur meant when he said all Tommy had to be was Tommy.

Then, there was the blaring ding of the doorbell ringing, and a rock dropped into Tommy's gut.

Bolting upright, Tommy and Wilbur were mirrors of confusion. Tubbo and Ranboo had keys to the house, so they wouldn't ring the doorbell if they were back again. Niki could be at the door, but she would've texted Wilbur if she was coming over.

Stumbling to his feet, Tommy rushed out of his room with Wilbur hot on his heels. They both ran down the stairs, and while Tommy had a lead on Wilbur, Wilbur grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and yanked him backwards with surprising force when he got near the door.

Except Tommy was still faster than Wilbur, so he shoved himself forward, breaking Wilbur's grip on his shirt and lunging for the doorknob. Without thinking twice, he yanked it open, his breath catching in his throat when he saw who was on the other side.

Blue eyes met green, and there was a moment of silence as Tommy stared Hannah down, neither one of them moving.

Then, Tommy slammed the door in her face again.

Or, at least he tried to.

A slim hand with perfectly manicured fingernails caught the door before it shut all the way. Hannah pushed it back open, but didn't make any moves to come inside.

"I'm not here to fight," Hannah declared, holding her hands up by her head while her wings fluttered behind her. "I just wanna talk."

Hearing her voice, Wilbur hissed, shoving Tommy behind him and holding onto his wrist in an iron grip. "We don't care what you have to say. You have five seconds to get the hell away!"

"I want to make the Syndicate an offer," Hannah cut him off. It was then Tommy noticed the sword she'd had with her the first time he'd seen her was lying on the ground by her feet, and the short skirt and blouse she was wearing didn't leave a lot of hiding places for other weapons.

"An offer for what?" Wilbur asked, narrowing his eyes.

Her pink, glossy lips curled into a dangerous smile.

"I'm here to offer you information on Dream and Punz."

Chapter End Notes

haha... rip to the bench trio fans and warm hugs for the crimeboys fans lmao

I've had the scene with Wilbur asking Tommy why he's lying to him about remembering for *so* long now. like it's just been circling in my head for ages and I'm so so glad I'm finally able to throw it out here. of course Tommy was not as slick as he thought, Wilbur has been suspicious of Tommy claiming to have no memories for a *while* at this point

also! I guess now is a good time to explain that my characterization of wilbur in this is kind of a fusion of alivebur and ghostbur as a result of his time having been dead. this isn't a commentary on how i interpret ghostbur vs alivebur in the dsmp because that's a whole other can of worms, but for this fic my characterization was largely influenced by emphasizing a bit more of the sweet and empathetic aspects of ghostbur and letting them shine through with wilbur here (this isn't implying there's multiple versions of forgetting!wilbur though. there's only this wilbur and no one else)

and now we have hannah again! I wasn't just gonna throw her in for two seconds and not bring her up again, yknow? so we'll be seeing a lot more of her next chapter :)

anyway, I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! it was just so much fun for me to write and now finally someone knows that tommy remembers so hooray one secret is kind of revealed!

I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic or want the opportunity to ask me questions go check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I also have a spotify playlist for this fic so make sure to check it out [here](#)

please leave a comment telling me what you thought! I don't reply to most but I read them all I swear! they really make me smile :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

a rose has her thorns

Chapter Summary

Hannah's offer stirs up some controversy.

Chapter Notes

hey hey everyone i'm here again!!! this is a far shorter chapter than usual because I actually had to split this one. originally it was 10k words, but then I realized for pacing stuff and also just bc of the length it would be better to split it into two, hence why the total chapter count for this fic has been bumped up to 21 chapters

so yeah! sorry this is gonna be a shorter chapter than usual, but ch 18 is already written in its entirety so expect that in a day or two!

hope you guys can enjoy it anyway <3 TWs I guess for threats of murder? you guys should know the drill by now though lol

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannah was tied up.

After she knocked on the door with her proposal, Wilbur had immediately screamed for Phil and Techno, who both sprinted at the panic in Wilbur's voice. She didn't resist as Techno held her arms behind her back, just repeated that she was only here to make an offer.

It had nearly been an hour since Tommy first opened the door to find the hunter on the other side of it. The entire Syndicate had come over, and they were all now crowded in the basement, standing around the single chair that Hannah was sitting in.

Her wrists were bound to the arms of the chair, and there was a cloth blindfold covering her eyes. Nervous energy crackled through the air like electricity as everyone gave each other unsure glances, waiting for Phil to come back down the stairs so they could start their line of questioning.

No one was wearing their masks this time. Sam and Ponk were standing closest to Hannah, talking in hushed voices as they kept glancing her way. Puffy was chatting with Niki, the women's nerves shown only through the stiffness in their postures. Techno and Jack were leaning against the wall opposite the chair, talking quietly enough that Tommy couldn't hear

them from where he was standing. Quackity, meanwhile, was off in his own corner, texting on his phone and looking like he'd rather be anywhere but here.

Tubbo and Ranboo had come back to the house as well. Tommy could feel their eyes lingering on him, clearly still nervous from the conversation they all had only a few hours before. Because Tommy still wasn't sure how he felt after what Tubbo had said, he chose to ignore them both.

It wasn't hard to ignore them. Not with Wilbur wrapping around Tommy like a koala, draping his arms over his chest and resting his chin on Tommy's head. Tommy could feel Wilbur's slowed down heartbeat thudding against his spine, and it was strangely calming to count the beats even though they were far too slow to ever match his own.

Tommy had no idea what Wilbur was going to do now that he knew Tommy remembered. The logical thing was to tell Phil and Techno, but obviously now wasn't a great time to talk about that. If he could pull Wilbur aside he'd ask him to keep quiet about it, but again, now was the absolute worst time to try and pull Wilbur out of the room.

Besides, he had a feeling Wilbur wouldn't leave the basement even if Tommy tried to drag him out. His eyes hadn't left Hannah since the door had first opened. It was as if he was waiting for her to even breathe in Tommy's direction. He was terrified, that much was obvious. Wilbur's hands were folded where they hung over Tommy's chest, but despite how tightly his fingers were interlaced, Tommy could see they were trembling.

Leaning further back against Wilbur, Tommy brought his own hand up to rest over Wilbur's folded ones. "Wilbur, it's okay. She's tied up and can't do anything to us. See?"

He heard Wilbur take an unsteady breath, before burying his face in Tommy's hair.

"I know," he whispered. "I just- fuck, how did she even find us?"

"I don't know," Tommy admitted, watching as Hannah's fairy wings fluttered weakly against the back of the chair. "I guess that's gotta be one of the things we ask her."

"She saw our faces," Wilbur pointed out. "Saw Phil and Techno's too."

"I feel like knowing where we live is worse than her knowing what we look like."

Wilbur huffed. "Fair point."

There was the sound of footsteps to the left, and Tommy glanced over to see Puffy walking towards the both of them. Her curls bounced with every step, and something softened in her eyes as she looked between both him and Wilbur.

"You two look comfortable," she commented, giving them a small smile. "You might wanna let the kid breathe though, Wil-"

"No," Tommy and Wilbur both said at the same time, cutting Puffy off midsentence.

Yeah, fuck that. Wilbur was shaking like he was on the edge of having a breakdown, and Tommy wasn't doing much better. Physical touch helped keep Wilbur grounded to reality, and it also reminded Tommy that his brother was right here—that he wasn't going anywhere.

Puffy blinked in surprise. "Oh, uh, okay then. You boys holding up alright?"

"There's nothing about this situation that's fucking alright," Wilbur muttered, not looking at Puffy. "A hunter that's already tried to kidnap Tommy once found our home, and now we're just sitting down here with her while Phil does god knows what upstairs. For all we know, Dream and Punz could be waiting outside the front door right now."

"Wil, even if Dream and Punz break in here guns blazing, we're not letting Tommy get taken again," Puffy reassured him.

"You can't promise that," Wilbur scoffed.

Sighing, Puffy reached out a hand to rest on Wilbur's shoulder, but he suddenly flickered into intangibility. Tommy stopped feeling the chest pressed against his back and the arms resting over his chest, and Puffy gasped as her hand passed through Wilbur's arm.

As soon as Puffy yanked her hand back, Wilbur re-solidified. He tugged Tommy even closer, stepping to the side away from Puffy while pointedly avoiding her eyes.

"Wilbur," she said softly, sounding more upset than actually offended.

"I- I'm sorry just- please don't touch me," he shot back, and Tommy could feel the slowed down heartbeat picking up speed against his spine.

Puffy held her hands up by her head, showing she wasn't going to try and touch him again. After a few tense seconds, the tension in Wilbur's body relaxed, and Puffy dropped her hands to her sides.

"Tommy, are you okay with this?" She then asked, gesturing to Wilbur who was still clinging to Tommy for dear life.

Tommy nodded. "It's fine." It was a short answer, but the only one Tommy could think of that didn't give anything away. What he wanted to say was, *it's fine, when Wilbur's anxious like this he needs physical touch to ground him*. He wanted to say, *this is fine because I've done this before, I'm his anchor*. He wanted her to understand that, *I'm not letting anyone else near my brother when he's like this so don't try that again*.

But all of those would reveal that he remembered. And Tommy knew that the others wouldn't be nearly as understanding about it all as Wilbur was.

Thankfully though, before Puffy could push the issue, the sound of footsteps hitting stairs echoed through the basement. Everyone fell silent as Phil appeared in the doorway, his wings fluffed up behind him and his lips set in a grim line.

"Everyone here?" He asked, glancing around the room.

“We’re all accounted for,” Sam answered.

Phil nodded, stepping fully through the doorway. His gaze flickered over Tommy and Wilbur, the icy glint in his eyes melting at the pair of them. He gave them both what was probably an attempt at a reassuring smile, but it was weak at best and sad at worst.

Then, Phil’s smile fell as he turned to look at Hannah. Despite the fact that she was tied up and blindfolded, she didn’t seem particularly concerned about her current situation. Her wings stilled their fluttering, as if she could feel Phil’s eyes on her.

There was a beat of silence.

“So why are you here?” Phil finally asked, folding his hands in front of him.

Hannah huffed. “I told you. I wanna make you guys an offer for information on Dream and Punz.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be working for Dream?” Phil questioned, raising an eyebrow.

“Technically I was, until Punz got the jump on me and found the kid first. After we all had our little run-in, Punz and I both went back to Dream and he told me he didn’t need me anymore. That he and Punz were going to continue searching on their own,” Hannah explained, tapping her feet against the floor absently.

“Why did he hire two hunters in the first place?”

“Because he’s an asshole,” Hannah said, groaning as she tilted her head back. “He wanted to give us more motivation to find his little sidekick faster, so he said a healthy competition was the way to do it. Whichever one of us found Tommy first would get paid double.”

“So Punz got the credit for finding him first even though he didn’t bring him back?” Phil pushed.

“Pretty much. I think it’s because he also had information on stuff Tommy said, whereas I showed up late so I didn’t have any time for chit chat.” Huffing again, Hannah blew a curly strand of dark hair out of her face. “So now I’m pissed at Dream and Punz both. Punz has always been a bit of a bastard, stealing my bounties out from under me, and Dream is just a bad employer.”

Phil considered this for a moment, tapping his chin as he stared at Hannah’s blindfolded face.

“Do you want us to pay you the same amount Dream would’ve paid you had you found Tommy first?”

Hannah snorted. “Are you kidding? I know the Syndicate has its hands in every questionable bit of business in the city, so I want way more than what Dream was paying me.”

Pursing his lips, Phil was silent for a few beats. He didn’t seem worried about whatever the price was, and Tommy knew that was because Hannah was right. The Syndicate was loaded, so money wasn’t the issue here.

“How did you find out where we live?” Phil asked, furrowing his eyebrows together.

“I’m not telling you any of that until you agree to pay me first,” Hannah said, smirking now. “And if you don’t, you’re going to lose your kid pretty damn soon. I guarantee it.”

Tommy’s breathing hitched in his throat, while Wilbur’s arms tightened around him.

“What information exactly will you tell us if we agree to this?” Sam cut in, taking a step forward.

“I’ll tell you what Dream and Punz’s current plan is for finding Tommy, I’ll tell you what Punz’s power is because it’s not just the super speed you saw, and I’ll tell you how I found out where you all live.”

Phil and Sam shared a look, before Techno stepped up and whispered something into Phil’s ear. Puffy then joined the group, and the four of them spoke in hushed voices for a moment before Phil finally nodded.

“Fine. We’ll pay you fairly for your information. Now tell us about Dream and Punz.”

Hannah’s grin turned sharp. “Well, like I said, Punz’s power isn’t just super speed. The reason Punz is such an effective hunter is because he’s also a tracker, and not just by trade. If you imagine someone’s aura kind of like a scent, then he’s essentially a bloodhound. He can track people by their life energy, but he has to be within a certain vicinity of the person to do it.”

Techno made a questioning noise. “What’s the range?”

“I don’t know specifically, but it’s within a few miles. It doesn’t work on strangers either. He has to have something that used to belong to the person he’s tracking so he can lock onto their ‘signature’ or whatever the hell he calls it. When Dream hired us, he gave Punz an old sweatshirt of Tommy’s, while I just got a physical description of the kid.”

“So he has to be within a few miles of the person to track them. Does that mean he’s just going around the city randomly until he picks up Tommy’s signature?” Sam asked, folding his arms over his chest.

“Pretty much. He hasn’t checked Prime Heights yet, but once he does, you guys are gonna be fucked,” Hannah finished, blowing that strand of hair out of her face again.

Everyone stiffened at that. The four gathered in front of Hannah exchanged nervous looks, before they all looked to Phil for where to go from there.

Phil was silent for a moment, jaw clenched and feathers puffed up. After a few beats, he took a step forward so he was standing directly in front of Hannah’s chair, and bent over so they were face to face.

“If Punz hasn’t found us yet, how did you discover where we lived?” He asked.

Hannah didn't flinch, even with Phil's face so close to hers. "You should be able to guess, Thanatos. I have wings just like you."

Phil narrowed his eyes. "You followed us back by flying above us?"

She nodded. "Yup. After you guys showed up, I flew to the roof of a nearby building and watched until you guys headed out. Then I just followed your car from there."

Shit. It was so simple, but something none of them even considered at the time. Of course Hannah would stick around to follow them home. Just because she had gotten out of the way when the Syndicate all came out of the warehouse didn't mean she had left entirely, and that was something they should've thought of.

"Fuck," Wilbur whispered in his ear.

"Yeah, you can say that again," Tommy muttered.

"If you and Punz weren't working together, how did you find us at the warehouse?" Phil then asked.

"Even in a city, you're never that far from a tree or a flower," Hannah said, sounding all too smug as she explained. "Plants love to talk if you know how to listen to them."

Techno frowned. "Are you saying a plant told you where we were?"

"I guess that's the easiest way to explain it," Hannah shrugged. "Though Punz still beat me to you which screwed everything up."

Phil considered this for a moment, narrowing his eyes at Hannah's blindfold once again.

"You know, you've told us quite an awful lot of very useful information. Not to mention, you've seen the faces of me and my sons," Phil told her, his voice having dropped to something dangerously low.

Tommy noticed the black talons growing from Phil's fingernails, and let out a sharp gasp as he watched Phil place his blackened fingers on top of the hand Hannah had resting on the arm of the chair.

"You are a very dangerous person to me and my family right now, Hannah," Phil told her. "You've already told us what we need to know. Why shouldn't I kill you right now to make sure you don't go running back to Dream and tell him where we live?"

Heart pounding in his ears, Tommy had to fight down the bile rising in his throat. This wasn't- He didn't want to watch Phil kill Hannah. Even if she was a hunter out to get him, she was still a *person*.

Unlike Tommy though, Hannah didn't seem alarmed by the threat to her life standing right in front of her. Instead, her smile grew even sharper.

"If you kill me right now, you'll just be killing yourself as well," Hannah said.

And it was then Tommy noticed something green on her hand.

A vine slithered out from under the sleeve of her blouse, wrapping around Phil's fingers and twisting itself up his arm. He stiffened but didn't try to pull away, eyes going wide as the vine threaded under his shirt until it was poised right next to his neck. On the end of the vine, Tommy saw a deadly sharp thorn covered in some kind of viscous, black substance.

"No one move," Hannah ordered.

Tommy's breathing stuttered. That thorn was clearly poisonous. It was less than an inch away from Phil's throat, and it was poisonous. One wrong move, and Phil was going to die. He might be able to kill with a single touch, but he wasn't impervious to harm.

It was taking every ounce of willpower he had not to sprint over there and rip the vine away from Phil's neck right that second. His limbs burned with electricity, the familiar anger rising up inside of him as his family was threatened *again*.

Wilbur's grip around him had gone from something comforting, to something restrictive. Tommy wasn't sure if Wilbur was trying to hold him back, or if he was holding onto Tommy to keep himself from rushing forward. It was probably both, but either way, it was getting difficult for Tommy to breathe with how tightly Wilbur had his arms wrapped around him.

Techno seemed to be having a similar struggle. Niki had joined the four by the chair, and had a hand resting on Techno's back. Her eyebrows were furrowed in what looked like intense concentration, and Tommy imagined it was taking a lot out of her to keep Techno calm in that moment.

"My power kills instantly. Who's to say I won't be able to kill you before you can kill me?" Phil asked after a few agonizing beats of silence.

"I don't control the plants, I just talk to them," Hannah explained. "If that vine feels me die, it won't hesitate to kill you."

Phil huffed in what sounded more like amusement than anything else. "Then I suppose we're at an impasse."

"Seems so."

One second.

Two seconds.

Then,

"How do I know we can trust you to leave here without telling Dream where we are?" Phil asked, being careful not to move his head.

"You don't. But I would do anything to fuck Punz over, and coming here to talk to you all is really gonna throw a wrench in his plans." Hannah's smile had gone back to sweet instead of

sharp, but that didn't make Tommy want to tackle her out of that chair any less. "There are really only two options here, Thanatos. Either you let me go, or both of us are going to die."

There was a staredown between Phil and Hannah despite the fact that Hannah's eyes were completely hidden. The silence was suffocating, weighing down on everyone's shoulders with tension hanging in the air that was thick enough to cut with a knife.

Tommy couldn't breathe. His lungs were spasming as he tried to keep himself calm, but his heart was slamming against his ribcage, and he found himself straining against the arms Wilbur had wrapped around him.

"If I let go of your hand, will you tell your vine to unwrap itself from me?"

"Yes."

Another beat.

Then, Phil carefully lifted his hand off of Hannah's. The vine quivered, before it slowly pulled itself back under his shirt, unwrapping around his arm and slithering back onto Hannah's hand. As soon as it was no longer touching Phil's skin, Techno grabbed his shoulder to yank him back, while Wilbur finally let go of Tommy.

Both of them sprinted towards Phil, and Phil didn't question it as Tommy threw himself at his dad. Terror was still racing through him, making it difficult to breathe as he thought about how Phil was only seconds away from death, and there would've been nothing Tommy could do.

"I'm okay," Phil whispered, smoothing a hand over Tommy's curls.

Tommy felt something brush beside him, and realized Wilbur had buried his face in Phil's shoulder. His shoulders were shaking, and his hands were curled into fists at his sides. Behind Phil, Techno was still gripping their father's shoulder, his eyes steely as they stared down Hannah.

"So are you guys gonna untie me now?" Hannah then asked.

Flames licked the inside of Tommy's chest as he whirled around to face the hunter.

"Don't you ever fucking touch my dad again!" Tommy snarled at her, making sure to stay far enough back so he wasn't within reach of her vines.

"Dad, huh?" Hannah chuckled to herself, slumping against the back of her chair. "God, Dream really fucked himself over with this one."

Tommy clenched his jaw, the twisting rage inside of his chest growling like a rabid animal that had just caught the scent of blood. It was the same anger he'd felt towards Punz, and it was so foreign but so familiar at the same time.

There was a warm hand on the back of his neck, and Techno tugged Tommy back so he was a little further away from Hannah. "Careful, Asphodel," he murmured.

Taking a breath to try and steady himself, Tommy forced himself to turn away from Hannah and instead buried his face in Phil's chest. His heart was beating steadily against Tommy's ear, a normal rhythm unlike the slowed down metronome that sat inside Wilbur's chest.

"Minos," Phil suddenly called out. "Can you untie her and see to it that she receives her payment?"

Sam nodded. "I can do that. If you want, I can also make sure she gets back to her own home alright."

For the first time in the entire conversation, Hannah stiffened in her seat. "That's not necessary. I can just fly there."

"It's quite alright, Hannah. We insist," Phil said, smiling at the hunter.

It was clear from his tone that it wasn't an offer. If she knew where they lived, they were going to know where *she* lived. And no one was going to untie her until she agreed.

Realizing she didn't have a choice with this, Hannah sighed. "Fine."

Sam set about undoing the ties on Hannah's wrists, while Phil wrapped his wings around Wilbur and Tommy as he guided them back towards the stairs. "Everyone else come upstairs. We need to talk about what we're going to do from here."

"Wait."

Hannah's voice made Tommy tense again, and as he turned around, he saw that Sam had frozen in the middle of reaching for her ties.

"Yes, Hannah?" Phil asked, his tone strained.

"Can I ask you guys something? Unrelated to everything else, there's just something I'm curious about."

Phil made sure to keep a wide berth between him and Hannah as he fully turned back around. "If you insist."

Blowing that strand of hair out of her face for a third time, Hannah straightened up again. "If you're gonna be keeping an eye on me from now on or whatever, I feel like it's only fair for me to ask what you guys are doing here anyway."

Techno took a step forward, putting himself as a shield between Phil, Wilbur, Tommy and the hunter. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what's the Syndicate's goal anyway? I know you guys are villains and that you have your fingers in a lot of pies, but I don't actually know what you're trying to do here anyway."

"Why would you care?" Techno asked.

"Maybe I wanna see if you're hiring. Who knows?" Hannah said with a smile.

Techno bristled at this, and Niki appeared by his side, pressing a hand to his back to calm him down again.

“While we don’t really hire people who’ve tried to kill our leader before, if you must know, we’re an organization based around anarchy. The government is corrupt and doesn’t care for the people, the Heroes are only designed as buffed up police with superpowers, and the rich are the real people in control.”

Hannah tilted her head to the side. “So you want to get rid of the government?”

Techno nodded. “Yup.”

“And what’s your plan for after you get rid of the government?”

There was a moment of silence as Techno blinked, clearly surprised by the question.

“After?”

“Yes, after. What are your plans for maintaining infrastructure? Keeping things like hospitals and schools running?”

Frowning, Techno took another step towards Hannah’s chair. “We as the Syndicate will seize control for the transition, and focus on creating community-based organizations and solutions.”

Hannah let out a barking laugh at this. “You guys say you’ll take control for the transition, but you really mean you’ll just take control completely, huh?”

“No-”

“What happens when community-based solutions don’t work? What happens when you still need pharmaceutical companies to make medication, and people to manage hospitals, and someone to mandate school, and everything else that goes into running a city?” Hannah challenged. “You guys are going to stay in control because there’s never going to be a good time to transition out.”

“We’re not going to be a government though. We’ll just be overseeing things,” Techno defended, although his argument was getting weaker by the second.

“That’s literally a government, Acheron,” Hannah pointed out. “If anything, that’s worse than our current government because the Syndicate wouldn’t have been elected to their position of power. You all would’ve just taken control by force. And guess what? That’s called an oligarchy.”

Techno was silent, and even with Niki’s hand on his back, Tommy could practically see the frustration radiating off of him in waves.

“I’m not judging. I don’t give a shit who’s in control as long as I still get my work,” Hannah added after a moment. “Just don’t lie to yourselves about what you’re doing.”

A heavy silence fell over the room as Techno glared at Hannah. Phil was shooting her a dirty look as well, while Niki had something more conflicted painted over her face.

Meanwhile, Wilbur didn't seem surprised by Hannah's words. If anything he just looked... tired. Like he knew what she was saying was true, and had been forced to accept it a long time ago.

Then, without saying another word, Techno stormed out of the basement and everyone took that as the cue to follow suit.

Chapter End Notes

Hannah is such a girlboss in this i love her

also, shit pops off in the next chapter so look forward to that! i'll probably post it in a day or two since it's already written and a lot of very fun stuff happens :)

I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

there's also a spotify playlist for this fic and it pops off so check it out [here](#)

hope you guys enjoyed! let me know what you thought of this chapter down in the comments, I love wf!hannah so much and was very excited to have an entire chapter dedicated to her like this. I don't respond to most comments but I read all of them and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

oh blame blame blame

Chapter Summary

Hannah's interrogation leads to some unexpected conflict.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone it's me again :) I told you I had this chapter already finished since I had to split it! so again, a little shorter than usual because originally this was the second half of ch 17 but so much happened I felt like I needed to separate it. so here you go!

I hope you guys have fun with this chapter because I know I had a ton of fun writing it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They all filed out of the basement through the narrow staircase, the anger in Tommy's blood cooling with every step they took. The sunlight pouring through the windows of the living room was blinding compared to the dim basement. Once everyone was out of the staircase, Phil let go of Tommy and Wilbur and gently pushed them towards the dining room.

"Let's all sit down," he suggested.

As soon as Phil was no longer holding onto them both, Wilbur drifted back to Tommy's side, and they settled themselves in two chairs next to where Phil was sitting at the head of the table. Tubbo and Ranboo both looked a bit lost for what to do as they sat across from Tommy, while Puffy sat on the other side of him. Niki sat next to Ranboo, Jack next to her, and Quackity grunted as he sat beside Jack.

Ponk and Techno were the last two to sit down, with Ponk settling on the other side of Puffy, and Techno sitting at the head of the table opposite Phil.

From the corner of Tommy's eye, he saw Sam leading Hannah out the foyer and to the front door. He had a hand wrapped around her arm, and she was scowling at him as they walked. Sam waved as he opened the front door, and everyone was silent as the door slammed shut behind the two of them.

Outside the house, Tommy heard the sound of Sam's car starting up. The engine quieted as Sam pulled out of the driveway, and soon enough, it was gone completely.

Only then did Phil speak.

“So that was a lot.”

“You should’ve let me kill her,” Techno growled immediately. “Even if she did poison me with that vine, I would’ve come back.”

Phil shook his head. “There’s no need for that. Hannah’s smart. She wasn’t outwardly hostile, but she did what she had to to protect herself.”

“Dude, she kind of tried to kill you,” Quackity pointed out, speaking up for the first time.

“Believe me, I’m well aware of that. But it was only because I threatened her first, which is quite understandable,” Phil pointed out. “She seems to recognize that making an enemy of the Syndicate is a bad idea, hence why she flew away instead of trying to fight us back at the warehouse.”

“As soon as Sam leaves she could run and tell Dream where we live,” Techno argued.

“Well, according to her, Punz is going to find us sooner or later anyway,” Wilbur huffed, leaning back in his chair.

“That’s true. It’s only a matter of time before Punz finds Tommy with his tracking ability,” Niki agreed. “So it wouldn’t do Hannah any good to tell Dream where you live, because she knows that would just put her on the bad side of the Syndicate.”

“I think we can agree Hannah is not our biggest issue at the moment,” Phil said, regaining control of the conversation. “What we need to focus on now is Dream.”

“Finally, the fuckin’ important stuff,” Jack muttered. Niki smacked his arm at that, and Jack shot her a confused look which she ignored.

“Quackity, you’re the only one of us who has seen Dream recently. What’s your take on him?” Puffy asked, turning the focus onto him.

Quackity blinked, looking taken back by everyone staring at him. He quickly regained his composure though, coughing as he straightened up in his seat. “Well, I’ve mentioned this before, but ever since Tommy got taken, Dream has been refusing to talk to anyone in the Hero Tower besides Cordyceps. That’s still true. I’ve barely seen him walking around the Tower, and while most of the others just assume he’s in his apartment, I’m pretty sure he’s been out making his arrangements with Punz and Hannah.”

“Do you think Cordyceps knows what’s going on?” Niki asked.

“Probably,” Quackity snorted. “I dunno what’s going on between those two, but Cordyceps definitely wouldn’t give much of a shit if he found out Dream had a kid working as his sidekick.”

“Hm, Cordyceps might be a problem then,” Techno murmured, tapping his chin.

Then, to Tommy’s surprise, Ranboo spoke up. “Why would he be a problem?” He asked quietly, shrinking back when everyone’s eyes fell on him.

Techno raised an eyebrow. “Because if Cordyceps knows what’s going on, he probably knows Tommy’s identity. And if he knows Tommy’s identity, and we kill Dream, Cordyceps could use that against us.”

Everyone at the table stiffened as if a cold breeze had blown through the room. Tommy’s heart dropped into his stomach, the words *kill Dream* looping over and over again in his mind.

One of the only people at the table who didn’t seem startled by the casual reference to murdering Dream was Quackity. “Nah, I wouldn’t worry about him. Cordyceps isn’t the type of guy to go and try and avenge his friend or whatever.”

“Wait, can we back up a second?” Tommy cut in, wincing at the way his voice cracked when he spoke. “The fuck do you mean you’re gonna kill Dream?”

“Yeah Techno, I think we might want to consider how bad that could be for us,” Ponk agreed, metal fingers tapping against the table. “Like, if we kill the Number One Hero, the Heroes are gonna be pissed as hell at us.”

“What other choice do we have? Dream isn’t gonna give up until he gets Tommy back, and pretty soon he’s gonna know where we live. If that happens, we’re all screwed,” Techno pointed out.

“But- But you guys can’t just kill him!” Tommy said, desperate to try and get them to listen. “He’s not a bad person!”

“Tommy, he kidnapped you.” Phil’s voice was gentle, as if he was telling Tommy something he didn’t already know.

“And you guys are murderers!” Tommy shouted, and several people at the table flinched. “Dream isn’t an innocent person, but at least he didn’t explode a building that had fifteen fucking people inside of it!”

Phil didn’t seem bothered by the venom Tommy was spitting at him. He just sat with a flat expression, hands folded on the table in front of him. “He kidnapped you and took your memories away. How can you be okay with that?”

“I’m not okay with it, but it doesn’t mean he deserves to die,” Tommy argued, curling his hands into fists. “Besides, we still don’t know if he actually was the reason I lost my memories, or if something else happened. Hell, we don’t even know for sure that he kidnapped me!”

Now *that* seemed to bother Phil. His wings fluffed up again behind him, and Tommy noticed the muscles in his jaw twitch. “You think he just asked if he could erase your memories and you said yes?”

Tommy scowled. “That’s obviously not what I’m fucking saying, Phil. But unless I literally disappeared from my bed, how did he even get a hold of me?”

“You weren’t a prisoner when you lived with us last. I thought you’d realized that by now,” Techno said, standing up as well. “One night you went out on your own, and you never came back. What else were we supposed to think except that you got kidnapped?”

Behind him, Tommy heard Wilbur shift in his seat, but didn’t glance back to see what he was doing. Instead, he leaned further across the table, narrowing his eyes at his older brother and father. “So that was it? I just left and you guys didn’t bother asking me where I was going?”

“None of us saw you leave,” Phil told him, his voice softer now. “It was very late at night, but you took your phone with you. I texted you and you told me you were going to Tubbo and Ranboo’s place, but didn’t mention why.”

Tommy frowned, turning to Tubbo and Ranboo who were watching the exchange with wide eyes.

“Did I tell you guys I was coming over?”

Neither Tubbo or Ranboo looked like they wanted to get involved in the conversation at hand, but Tommy stared them down until Tubbo spoke up.

“You texted me saying you needed to come over because you were pissed about something, and you’d tell us about it in person. But then you just… never showed up.” While Tubbo had lifted his head to meet Tommy’s eyes, Ranboo had curled up in his chair. He never did like confrontation, so he probably wanted to stay out of this fight as much as possible.

But Tommy wasn’t focused on Ranboo right now. Or Tubbo for that matter. What he was thinking about was why he would’ve left that night. No memories popped up at Tubbo’s explanation, but hearing that he was pissed about something *felt* right.

For the first time in a while, Tommy found himself pounding against the black wall in his mind. He needed to remember this. To remember what happened between him and Dream. To figure out how he ended up losing his memories in the first place.

It was the answer to everything. It was the crux of all his questions.

Why him? Why did Dream do this? Why has he been put through this hellish identity crisis?

What did he do to deserve this?

His head was throbbing with an oncoming headache. Groaning, Tommy rubbed at his temples and squeezed his eyes shut.

“You guys have to be lying or- or something! There’s no way you guys just don’t know what would’ve pissed me off that badly that I was going to walk all the way to Tubbo and Ranboo’s!” Tommy yelled, glaring at Phil and Techno.

When he was met with identical blank stares from the two men, the anger welled up inside his chest once more. But before he could shout again, a voice from behind spoke before him.

“Tommy, stop this,” Wilbur said, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Tommy whirled around to frown at his brother. “Wil, you know they know. I’m not asking for anything unreasonable here—”

“But you are because they don’t know!” Wilbur shouted, making Tommy flinch with how loud he was.

Tension settled over the room like a thick fog.

“You don’t know that for sure,” Tommy challenged.

Closing his eyes, Wilbur took a shaky breath before meeting Tommy’s gaze again.

“You’re wrong. I do know that for sure. Because it’s my fault you left the house that night.”

The words were like a gavel slamming down, the echo reverberating off the walls and pounding straight into Tommy’s skull.

“What?!” Phil yelled.

“Wilbur, what do you mean it was your fault?” Techno asked, his anger restrained by a very thin rope.

Wincing, Wilbur scrunched up his face but didn’t close his eyes again. Instead, he met Tommy’s eyes, and Tommy could see his own reflection in the tears pooling there.

“We got into a fight that night,” he started, his voice cracking. “You wanted to do more stuff with the Syndicate, and I was still trying to convince you to wait. I worded some shit badly, and you thought I meant that you weren’t capable of being useful to the Syndicate. I tried to explain myself, but you stormed out before I could, and I- I figured-” his breathing hitched, “I thought it would be better to let you cool down. So I didn’t go after you.”

Oh.

Oh.

Wilbur had been so distraught when he found out Tommy was Lucid. He remembered hearing Wilbur’s panic attack, thinking he was faking it. He remembered the way his shoulders shook when Niki forced Tommy to reveal his amnesia. He remembered the way Wilbur’s eyes always swam with so much pain and sadness when he looked at him.

It wasn’t just him missing Tommy. That had been *guilt*.

Because they’d gotten into a fight. Because Wilbur had been trying to protect him, and Tommy had been too stubborn to see. Because Tommy had gotten angry and stormed out of the house, but never came back home.

“Oh Wilbur,” Tommy whispered, his chest aching badly enough to make him wince. “Have you been blaming yourself this whole time?”

“It was my fault,” Wilbur insisted. “I should’ve gone after you. If I had just gone after you-”

“Shut up, that’s not your fault,” Tommy said, cutting him off. “You were just trying to give me space.”

“Actually, I’m with Wilbur here,” Techno cut in, Tommy realizing he’d gotten up and walked around to their side of the table. “This is directly his fault.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you, Techno?!” Tommy hissed.

“Techno, you know that’s not true,” Phil interrupted, also having moved out of his seat and to their side of the table. “But Wilbur, you lied to us. You told me and Techno you had no idea why Tommy left the house. Why the *fuck* would you do that if you knew you’d gotten in a fight?”

Wilbur winced at Phil’s cold tone. “It’s not like it mattered! Once we figured out Tommy had been taken, I didn’t think it was worth bringing up why he left in the first place because we all knew he wasn’t just going to run away like that!”

“Actually, it matters a lot. What if he hadn’t been kidnapped and ran away because he was pissed at you? We would’ve been tearing the city apart for no reason!” Techno argued, taking a step towards Wilbur.

“You know that’s not true. We didn’t assume Tommy was kidnapped until we found that security footage of Dream carrying him down the street,” Wilbur defended.

“Wait, security footage?” Tommy questioned.

Phil sighed. “Y’know how we didn’t start making our demands to the Heroes until you’d already been with Dream for a bit?” Tommy nodded. “That’s because we had no reason to believe you were with Dream until Tubbo found some CCTV footage of Dream carrying you the night you disappeared.”

That was something Tommy remembered. Right after waking up in that alleyway, after Dream offered to let Tommy stay at his place, Tommy had been too dizzy to walk himself. So Dream had carried him down several streets to a waiting car, where they had then driven back to the Hero Tower.

Tommy had wondered how the Syndicate had figured out Dream had him in the first place, and he supposed that was the answer.

That wasn’t the focus on the conversation right now though.

“I can’t believe you lied to us,” Techno huffed, glaring at Wilbur. “You lied straight to our faces.”

Wilbur turned to Phil, clearly searching for some kind of help or defense from his father. But Phil stared him down with icy eyes as he shook his head. “Wil, I don’t wanna hear your excuses right now. I just want to understand why you’d lie to us about something so huge.”

Wrapping his arms tighter around himself, a pang shot through Tommy’s chest when he noticed Wilbur’s form flickering. “I just- I was already blaming myself, I didn’t think I could

handle hearing you guys say it too.”

“Wil, c’mon, you know we wouldn’t have blamed you for that,” Phil said softly.

Clenching his jaw, Wilbur shook his head. “Actually, I didn’t know that, Phil. You and Techno both get so angry about shit that doesn’t even matter in the end, about your need for revenge or whatever, that I was terrified to tell you what happened. So don’t act like I could’ve come to you and told you what went down and you would’ve been all loving and understanding, because we both know that’s a fucking lie.”

Then, before Phil could respond to that, Wilbur’s form flickered again before disappearing entirely. Phil sighed and pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes, while Tommy jerked his head around, trying to figure out where Wilbur went.

“Don’t bother. He does that when he wants to be left alone,” Techno huffed.

Yeah, Tommy knew that. Of course Tommy fucking knew that. In fights, Wilbur could dish it out with a tongue so sharp, it left open wounds on the hearts of everyone who heard his voice. But he was also terrified of what people thought of him, and the second things got turned around on him, he would become convinced everyone around him hated him. And his best defense mechanism for that was to disappear and hide until the simmering anger in everyone’s chests died down.

Tommy also knew that Wilbur didn’t react well to being left alone when he thought people were upset with him. Even if he tried to convince himself he was fine with it by going invisible so no one could look at him, it only made him more upset in the long run.

Because while Tommy was the kind of person who would explode if bothered for too long, and anyone caught in the blast radius would get hurt, Wilbur wasn’t a bomb waiting to detonate. He was just... needy. Not in a derogatory way, but in the way that he *needed* reassurance, he *needed* people to look at him and say he wasn’t a horrible brother or son. And Tommy knew this because he knew Wilbur better than anyone else, just like Wilbur knew him better than anyone else.

Wilbur was his person, and he was Wilbur’s. And right now, his person needed him.

“He doesn’t need to be left alone you fucking idiot,” Tommy snapped, shoving his shoulder into Techno’s as he walked by.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Techno asked, catching his shoulder with his hand.

“To go find him,” Tommy hissed, yanking his shoulder out of Techno’s grasp.

“Tommy, I really don’t think that’s a good idea,” Phil said, his hand hovering in the air between them like he wanted to reach out, but wasn’t sure if he could.

“I know it’s a good idea,” Tommy insisted. “Seriously, you two should know this by now. You know how he gets when he’s upset! He starts thinking everyone hates him!”

Techno narrowed his eyes. "Just because you've spent a few weeks with him doesn't mean you know him better than his family does."

"I am his family!"

"But you don't remember us. Why are you acting like you know what's best when you don't even remember who we are?" Techno challenged.

And Tommy-

In that moment, Tommy saw red, and the words slipped out of his mouth without thinking of the consequences.

"Because I do remember you!" Tommy shouted, and a quiet gasp went up from the Syndicate members still at the table.

Techno's eyes went wide, and there was no more anger in his face. Instead, Tommy could see the hurt creased in the corners of his eyes and the way he stumbled back like Tommy had burnt him. Behind him, the only words Tommy could use to describe Phil's expression was pure heartbreak.

"You... How long-"

"I first started remembering a few months ago, and they've all just slowly come back on their own. I still don't remember how Dream kidnapped me, but everything else is pretty much back in place."

Phil winced. "Why wouldn't you tell us?"

Tommy grit his teeth as tears burned in his eyes. "Because I'm still not your Tommy, and I know that's who you really want. You tolerate me, but no matter how many heartfelt speeches you give, I know you've just been waiting for my memories to come back so you can have your kid back."

Even if Wilbur still loved this new version of himself, he knew that Phil and Techno weren't the same. They had always been more violent, more indulgent of their anger, and that was where the old Tommy had understood them. They were a family united in the desire to watch the world burn.

And now that that was gone, that meant they were all going to unravel.

Taking a step back, Tommy flinched when Phil reached out for him.

"Tommy, wait, we need to talk about this-"

"You don't need to pretend anymore, Phil," Tommy said, his voice cracking.

Phil paused, frowning at him. "What am I pretending to do?"

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Tommy took several more steps back until he was only a few feet from the stairs.

“You don’t need to pretend to love me anymore. You love the old Tommy, not me.”

And before either Phil or Techno could respond to that, Tommy whirled around and sprinted up the stairs as fast as possible. His feet pounded against the steps, and he didn’t hesitate to run straight to his old room, slamming the door shut behind him and twisting the lock shut.

As soon as he was alone, a sob tore out of his chest, and he buried his face in the pillows on his bed. They knew. They knew the truth now. They knew that Tommy wasn’t their Tommy and probably never would be again. They knew that he wasn’t the boy they wanted, and they weren’t going to pretend to care about him anymore.

His chest heaved now that the weight of all his secrets was finally off his shoulders. There was no relief tied to the fact though. Instead, there was only regret. Because even if he wasn’t the old Tommy, even if he had so many problems with the way they ran the Syndicate and hated the views they held, Phil and Techno were his family. He loved them so much, and it felt like his heart was being ripped in two knowing that there was no way they could love him back now.

As he buried his face into his pillow to let out his frustration, Tommy felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Pausing his scream, he looked up from the pillow, and didn’t see anyone else in the room.

But someone was watching him. He could feel it.

“Wilbur, I know you’re in here.”

There was a beat, and then the translucent form of Wilbur appeared near the door.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t trying to- I didn’t want to spy. I was just already here when you ran in here and then you started crying and-” he cut himself off with a shuddering breath. “I’m sorry, I should go. You probably don’t want to see me-”

“Wil, if you take one step out that door I’m going to kick your fucking ass,” Tommy said, and Wilbur froze.

With a deep sigh, Wilbur moved back so he was standing in front of the bed. “Lay it on me then. You out of all people have every right to tell me how badly I fucked up.”

And this was why Tommy had wanted to go find Wilbur in the first place after he went invisible.

“You’re such a fucking idiot. I’m not mad at you,” Tommy told him, hugging the pillow in his arms close to his chest.

“Tommy, you’re literally in here crying into your pillow.”

"Yeah, for reasons that have to do with Phil and Techno, not you," Tommy snapped. "Things went to shit after you ran off."

Wilbur blinked, frowning in confusion. "What happened?"

Letting out a shuddering breath, Tommy rested his chin on top of the pillow. "I... I told them," he admitted. "I told them I remembered."

The frown melted away instantly to complete understanding, followed by deep sorrow. "It didn't go well?" He whispered.

Tommy shook his head, another sob bubbling up from his chest. His shoulders hunched as he began to cry, and Wilbur let out a wounded sound.

"Can I..."

Nodding before Wilbur even finished his sentence, Tommy tossed the pillow to the floor and held his arms out expectantly. There was a brief flicker as Wilbur went back to being solid, and suddenly warm arms were wrapping around him and pulling his head into a familiar shoulder.

Tommy curled into Wilbur, clutching him like a lifeline as he sobbed. He sobbed for the relationship he knew he'd lost with his father and other brother, he sobbed in mourning of his old self, he sobbed because it was just so unfair that this happened to him in the first place.

He didn't miss the way Wilbur was clinging to him tighter than he usually did when he comforted Tommy. He also didn't miss the way his brother's shoulders were still shaking. So after a few minutes of crying, Tommy forced himself to take deep breaths until he got his tears under control, because he wasn't the only one having a breakdown right now.

"Are you feeling alright?" Wilbur asked once Tommy's breathing had evened out.

Resting his chin on Wilbur's shoulder, Tommy ignored the question and instead asked one of his own. "You know I'm not upset with you, right?" Wilbur immediately stiffened and tried to pull away, but Tommy squeezed Wilbur tighter—a silent refusal to let go. "I mean it. I'm not upset with you."

"You should be," Wilbur murmured, his warmth disappearing and reappearing as he flickered again. "It's my fault this all happened to you."

Letting out a deep sigh, Tommy pulled back just a bit so he could look his brother in the face. "You had no way of knowing I'd be fucking kidnapped if I walked out that door that night, so it's not your fault."

"I know I couldn't have known but..."

"No but's," Tommy cut him off. "Seriously, it's getting annoying. You're allowed to fuck up, and that doesn't make you a horrible brother."

"I... I know. I'm working on that. It's just—" Wilbur paused. "Never mind. It's stupid."

Tommy frowned. "What is it, Wilbur?"

Wilbur shook his head. "It's nothing."

Oh, it was something alright. Tommy could see the way some darker kind of sadness was lingering in the bags under his eyes and the crease between his eyebrows. Something heavier than just plain guilt.

Even though Tommy still couldn't remember the fight, he tried to imagine it anyway. What they both might've said. How things would've been left off.

Ice curled in his gut as he realized what might be upsetting Wilbur.

"Wilbur," Tommy said, waiting for his brother to meet his eyes, "what was the last thing I said to you before I stormed off?"

There was a flash of pain in Wilbur's eyes, but he quickly looked away. "It's not important."

The ice spread through his chest, and a shiver ran down his spine. "What did I say?"

"It's not important, Tommy," Wilbur insisted, although Tommy could hear how he was struggling to hold back something more in his voice.

"Tell it to me."

Clenching his jaw, Wilbur shook his head. "It's stupid and I know you didn't mean it-"

"Wilbur," Tommy snapped, and Wilbur's eyes immediately met his. "I have a right to know what I said."

And Wilbur stared at him for a few agonizing seconds, the internal conflict playing out across his face, before he finally slumped in defeat.

"You said-" he hesitated, squeezing his eyes shut as he let out a slow breath. "You said that you hated me. And that I was a piece of shit brother."

Wilbur repeated the words in a whisper, but they echoed through Tommy's head as loud as any scream.

Those were the last things Tommy said to Wilbur before he disappeared.

And then months later he'd come back, calling Wilbur a monster and telling him he'd never be his family.

"That- That's not true," Tommy whispered, his eyes burning again. "I don't hate you. You're not a piece of shit brother either."

Wilbur nodded. "I know," he reassured Tommy, but it was painfully easy to hear the lie in his tone.

Pulling Wilbur into another hug, Tommy wrapped his arms around his brother as tightly as he could. “I don’t hate you,” he repeated.

“Tommy, it’s okay, I know.”

“I’m not going to hate you even if I remember that stupid fight.”

There was a pause. Then another, “I know.”

It was softer this time.

“I don’t hate you,” Tommy repeated again. “Phil and Techno don’t hate you either.”

Silence.

“I don’t hate you.”

There was the sound of a muffled cry above his head.

“I might not remember that fight, but I know I didn’t mean it when I said I hated you.”

“You don’t know that for sure,” Wilbur whispered.

“I do know that for sure,” Tommy argued. “I know I don’t hate you for what happened, and you shouldn’t hate yourself for it either.”

And that seemed to break Wilbur.

Even though Wilbur had shed a few tears around him before, Tommy hadn’t heard Wilbur fully break like this since that first day when Wilbur took off his mask and discovered he was Lucid.

Tommy quickly readjusted so Wilbur could cry into his shoulder, holding onto him for dear life and soaking the fabric of his shirt. He let Wilbur cry himself out, knowing he probably needed it more than Tommy did considering Tommy had had significantly more crying breakdowns in front of Wilbur than he liked to admit.

After Wilbur calmed down, neither one of them really wanted to get up. Because if they left the room, they would probably run into Phil and Techno, and neither one was ready to confront those two just yet.

It had been an exhausting day. Tommy had cried quite a few times, had gotten into a fight with his best friends, had told Wilbur he remembered, had to deal with another possible kidnapping from a bounty hunter, had a fight with Phil and Techno, and then also told Phil and Techno he remembered.

By all accounts, Tommy should’ve wanted nothing more than to pass out. And his body seemed to want to, with how his limbs felt like lead and his head was stuffed with cotton.

But for some reason, he couldn’t sleep.

Wilbur was dead to the world, clinging to Tommy in his sleep like he was a kid with a stuffed animal. Apparently, when he was emotionally drained, Wilbur was a clingy sleeper. It wasn't much of a surprise.

Tommy's head buzzed with hundreds of different thoughts as Wilbur snored against his back. The Syndicate wanted to kill Dream. Tommy didn't like the idea of killing Dream, but he also knew that Dream was dangerous and the idea of leaving him alive could ruin everything.

Dream was just... so confusing. Tommy had so many questions for him, like why did he kidnap Tommy? How did he take away his memories? What was his long term plan?

The blank wall in Tommy's mind was giving no more answers. They were running on limited time until Punz used his tracking ability to find him, and if he found Tommy while he was still in the house, he'd find out where the rest of his family lived.

The solution was obvious. But it was going to hurt Wilbur, and that alone was almost enough to convince Tommy not to do it.

Almost.

As slowly as possible, Tommy wiggled out of Wilbur's hold, shoving a pillow behind him for Wilbur to hold onto. His snoring continued without interruption as he rolled to the other side, pillow wrapped securely in his arms.

Tommy stumbled to the floor, wincing at the dull thud his feet made against the carpet. He paused, and when Wilbur didn't wake up, he got to his feet and hurried to his desk.

The pencils and notebook were right where he remembered leaving them roughly six months ago. In the pale glow of the moonlight filtering through his window, Tommy scrawled out a note.

Wilbur,

I need to get answers for the things I can't remember, or else I'm gonna go insane. There's only one person who has the answers I need, so I figure I might as well go to him before he tracks me back here and I put the rest of you guys in danger.

I'm not leaving you guys. I just want answers. So when you read this, come get me back.

I'll be waiting.

Tommy

With the note written, Tommy forced himself to his feet, ignoring everything inside of him telling him to crumple up the paper and get back into the bed with Wilbur.

Shoving down the ache inside of him, Tommy spared one last look at his brother, who had his face smashed into the pillow with a bit of drool coming down his chin. The sight made Tommy huff out a silent laugh, and he used that brief moment of levity to force his feet towards the door to his room.

As he crept down the stairs, Tommy heard muffled voices coming from the basement. The door was cracked open, and bright light spilled out onto the hardwood floor.

With stealth he didn't know he had, Tommy ran silently to the front door. Then, he unlocked it and opened it as slowly as humanly possible, stopping every few seconds to make sure the voices from the basement didn't falter.

They didn't. Phil and Techno were deep in conversation it seemed.

Closing the door just as silently behind him, Tommy raced down the front lawn, heart pounding in his chest as he whipped his head around, looking for the flash of a white hoodie.

There was nothing. Punz hadn't found him yet.

The asphalt was still warm against his bare feet as he sprinted down the street. This late at night there were no cars out, so Tommy ran and ran and ran down the road as fast as his legs could carry him. He just needed to get within whatever Punz's tracking range was. All that mattered was that it was far from the house.

His lungs were screaming as he sprinted out of Prime Heights proper. He began to wonder if he was going to have to run all the way to South End for Punz to find him, but luckily (or unluckily, he supposed) there was the sound of sneakers slamming against pavement behind him as he slowed to a stop.

"That took longer than I thought," Tommy said, turning around to face the hunter.

Punz grinned at him, a gold chain around his neck glowing in the dim light of the streetlamp.
"What can I say? You're a hard man to find, Lucid."

Huffing, Tommy took a step towards Punz, his hands in the air.

The hunter raised an eyebrow. "So you're done with your tantrum and wanna go back to your mentor?"

Tommy scowled. "Just take me to Dream, fuckface."

Punz's echoing laugh sent shivers down Tommy's spine.

Chapter End Notes

everyone in my comments: oh god I can't believe tommy is gonna get kidnapped this is so sad

tommy, walking aimlessly around the streets for like thirty minutes looking for punz:
where's my fucking uber driver

also can you guys imagine how awkward it was to be the other syndicate members during that sbi fight. like you have phil and techno yelling at wilbur, wilbur yelling at them back, tommy defending wilbur, meanwhile ponk, puffy, quackity, tubbo, ranboo, niki, and jack are all just sitting there in silence

I hope you liked that argument though! and then the subsequent crimeboys hurt/comfort that we all know and love. look, I know there are a lot of scenes of crimeboys crying and comforting each other but 1. I think it makes sense within the context of the narrative and the plot and 2. i'm nothing if not a self indulgent author so i hope you don't mind that there's so many scenes like that sldkfjdasf

anyway I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

there's also a playlist for this fic! check it out [here](#)

let me know down in the comments if you enjoyed! i'm sure there are a lot of you eager to scream at me after that ending lol

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

a new lion's den

Chapter Summary

Tommy finally talks to Dream.

Chapter Notes

hello hello everyone I am here!! with more!!

finally, the chapter you've all been waiting for. not gonna lie I'm a little nervous to post this because some major plot stuff you've all been wondering about for a very long time gets revealed, and I hope it lives up to your expectations?

anyway, not gonna ramble too long, but LOOK IN MY END NOTES FOR A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT :D

hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Coming back to the Hero Tower after being away for so long was strange to say the least.

Punz kept one arm wrapped around his shoulders as they walked through the front of the Tower, with the hunter pulling out his own keycard to get them into the building. Him keeping Tommy close wasn't a friendly gesture. It was a silent threat. A warning to Tommy not to try and make a break for it.

Anxiety was twisting his stomach into knots, like his insides were a writhing animal screaming at him to get the fuck out while he still could.

This was stupid. Tommy was well-aware of the fact that this was a very, *very* stupid idea. But he couldn't stand this anymore. The idea of staying in that house for even another day, being a literal sitting duck as he waited for Punz to find his entire family and take him back to Dream by force—he couldn't do it.

Besides, Tommy wanted answers. Since he'd come back of his own volition, maybe Dream would be more willing to tell him the truth.

Maybe that was just wishful thinking. But it wasn't like Tommy had much else to go off of right now.

It was late at night, and the Tower was empty as Punz dragged him into the private elevator that led to the residence floors. With another swipe of his keycard, Punz punched the button for the top floor, and Tommy tried to shove down the nausea rising up inside of him as the elevator began to ascend.

Tommy had been in this elevator hundreds of times before, but things were so different now. The cool air blowing through the elevator car felt like thousands of tiny needles being jabbed into his arms. His heart was pounding in his ears, a terrified staccato that was telling him *you're making a mistake you're making a mistake you're making a-*

Fuck. This had the potential to be really bad. But at the same time, there was this strange yearning in his chest that kept his feet moving forward. This desire to find Dream and talk to him one on one.

A part of Tommy wanted to yell at him. To curse him out for taking him away from his family, for stealing his memories and tearing his mind into two halves of a whole.

The other part of Tommy just wanted... to talk to Dream. Not to yell. Not to get upset. Just ask him straight up what happened, because that part of him still wanted to believe that not all of Dream's words had been lies.

At one point in time, Dream told Tommy he cared about him. Tommy supposed now was the moment where he found out if there had ever been any truth to that.

The elevator dinged. Breath catching in his throat, Tommy didn't fight as Punz led him out of the elevator and into the hallway.

Dream's apartment was the only one on this floor, so the elevator opened up right in front of the door. Punz had one hand on the back of Tommy's neck, and used the other to knock.

"Dream!" Punz called out. "We're here!"

We. Tommy had noticed Punz texting someone on the drive over here, and figured he had been letting Dream know he'd found him. Still, it was startling to realize that this was real. Dream knew he was here with Punz. There was no going back now.

Muffled footsteps echoed from the other side of the door. Tommy clenched his jaw, mentally preparing himself to see Dream again so he could at least hope to keep some semblance of a poker face when that door opened.

The footsteps got louder. And louder. Then, Tommy could tell Dream was right on the other side of the door, and he was frozen in place as it swung open.

And just like that, there he was.

His kidnapper. His mentor.

Dream.

He was wearing his mask, because of course he was. Otherwise, he wasn't dressed in his hero clothes, instead just wearing a sweatshirt and sweatpants like he was lounging around the house as if it were any other day.

Tommy stared into the blank eyes of his mask, his heart practically slamming against his ribcage with every beat. Silence stretched between them as they looked at one another, and Tommy curled his hands into fists to keep them from shaking.

"Punz tells me you came with him willingly," Dream finally said after the longest ten seconds of Tommy's life.

It was like he was a puppet on a string as he nodded his head. "I did."

"But when you ran into him outside the warehouse, you told him to fuck off."

Another jerky nod. "Sure did."

There was another beat as Dream stared at him, and Tommy desperately wished he could see Dream's face at this moment. The mask was expressionless, and it was making Tommy's insides feel like they were being squeezed and twisted in every painful way you could think of.

Then, Dream took a step back, and held the door open wider. "Come in. We have a lot to talk about."

Tommy didn't get a chance to breathe before Punz was pushing him through the door, hand still on the back of his neck like he was a puppy who needed to be dragged around by the scruff. They stepped into the apartment, Tommy slapping Punz's hand away as soon as the door shut behind them. Although Punz frowned at him, he didn't try to grab Tommy again, but he could feel the hunter's eyes tracking him as he followed Dream into the living room.

The apartment was exactly how he remembered it. Same plush carpet, same soft couch, same bright TV that was playing some random show on silent. The only thing that wasn't the same was the person who was stretched across the couch, feet hanging over the side like he was some kind of overgrown cat.

"Cordyceps?" Tommy said, frowning as he spotted the familiar white goggles.

"Hey Lucid. It's been a while."

Cordyceps didn't seem the least bit surprised about him being here, nor did he seem surprised to be seeing Tommy's face. He was entirely apathetic to the situation around him, and Tommy figured Quackity had been right about Cordyceps knowing all about Dream's plans.

"Yeah, it sure has," Tommy muttered, eyeing Cordyceps warily as he tried to figure out where he should go from here.

"Feel free to take a seat anywhere you like," Dream told him, gesturing to the couch.

Tommy glanced between the open space on the couch and Cordyceps for a moment, before narrowing his eyes at Dream as he sat himself on the floor.

Dream huffed. "I never understood why you always sat on the floor. That can't be comfortable."

"I just like it."

Another beat as Dream stared at him, and Tommy imagined he was probably raising an eyebrow behind his mask. Even though Dream had stopped walking, he didn't sit down next to Cordyceps, instead choosing to stand on the other side of the couch.

"So what happens now?" Tommy asked when it became clear Dream wasn't going to say anything.

"Well, that depends on you," Dream told him, folding his arms over his chest. "We can either do this the easy way, where I ask you questions and you answer them honestly, or we can do this the hard way which is pretty much the same thing, except I get Punz and Cordyceps to help me get answers out of you."

Tommy scoffed, shoving down the fear that spiked in his chest at that. "I'll answer your questions if you answer mine. Does that sound fair?"

Dream considered him for a moment before nodding. "Fair enough. I'm sure there's a lot of things you want to know."

"Yeah, there fucking is," Tommy said, straightening up despite still sitting on the floor. "Like the fact that you told me I'd been kidnapped by the Syndicate when I wasn't."

To Tommy's frustration, this only made Dream laugh. "You got your memories back?"

"Not all of them, but enough to know that I wasn't kidnapped by them."

Dream hummed at this while leaning against the side of the couch. "Alright, I guess I owe you an explanation for that one. If you want the truth, I actually didn't know what your situation was with the Syndicate."

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "Bullshit."

"I'm not lying! Yeah, I'll be real, I knew you weren't kidnapped by them. But I didn't know what your deal was with them exactly. I knew you knew their identities, and I knew that you seemed to have some kind of arrangement with them, but I didn't know any of the details. I figured kidnapping wasn't stretching the truth that far, so that's what I went with."

"How the hell did you know I had any connection to the Syndicate at all?" Tommy asked, digging his nails into his palm.

"Do you remember when Acheron, Thanatos, Circe, and Moros made an appearance at that re-election rally Schlatt held?"

Tommy blinked, the memory appearing as soon as Dream mentioned it. That day had only been a few weeks before he had that argument with Wilbur. The Syndicate had been wanting to make some sort of public display to show their distaste for Schlatt's re-election campaign for a while at that point, and when they had come up with the idea to show up to one of his rallies, they all agreed it was a good idea to have someone in the rally crowd itself posing as a civilian.

When the idea came up, Tommy immediately volunteered himself to be the civilian. Even though he still hadn't been allowed to make his villain debut, it wasn't dangerous for him to just pose as a civilian. His only job would be to keep an eye on the crowd and watch the blind spots for the four villains. Sam gave him an earpiece to talk to the four of them during the rally, and Tommy spent the entire time pretending to be terrified with the rest of the civilians when in reality it had been almost impossible to keep a smile off his face.

That had actually been the precursor to his and Wilbur's argument. Because Wilbur didn't want to participate in something like that, insisting that it was pointless and would only serve to strengthen the city's resolve against them. Techno ended up asking Tommy not to tell Wilbur that he was participating in the event, so he lied to Wilbur and told him he was at Tubbo and Ranboo's place when it happened.

Of course Wilbur had eventually found out. Things only went downhill from there.

"Yeah, I remember that," Tommy said, suppressing the urge to wince when he remembered how much he had enjoyed participating in something like that.

"Afterwards, when I was overseeing the evacuation of the crowd, I noticed you run off in the opposite direction of everyone else. I got worried because I thought some kid had just gotten turned around in the chaos, so I followed you to try and show you where to go." He paused, shaking his head. "Imagine my surprise when I saw you run right up to Acheron and Thanatos and get into a car with them."

Shit.

Shit.

Was it really that easy? Had Tommy really fucked up that badly?

He had been so excited after the rally had dispersed. Even though he checked behind him multiple times to make sure he wasn't being followed, he clearly hadn't been careful enough. His head had been buzzing with all the things he wanted to talk to Phil, Techno, Niki, and Jack about, so many cool things he wanted to compliment them on and so many questions he wanted to ask about what more he could've done to help.

Tommy had been *so* excited to help his family terrorize a group of innocent civilians in the name of protesting a shitty politician. It made him sick to think about in retrospect.

"So- So you saw my face and-"

“And I got a picture that I later ran through the system to search for your records,” Dream continued. “Found out you were a runaway from the foster system, and hadn’t been seen in over a year. At first I assumed the Syndicate kidnapped you for your healing powers, but considering how excited you’d been to jump into that car, I had a feeling it was a bit more complicated than that.”

“You wanted to hunt me down after that?” Tommy asked.

Dream nodded. “Yup. It was just a hunch, but I was pretty sure you knew what the Syndicate’s identities were, and that alone was valuable enough information to make you my number one priority.”

“How did you find me then?”

“Honestly? It was pure luck,” Dream said with a shrug. “I was out patrolling one night, and I just happened to spot the exact teenager who I’d been trying to figure out how to hunt down for the past two weeks.”

Fucking hell. Tommy really had made it all too easy for Dream to grab him, and he hadn’t even realized it.

“Okay, so you grabbed me because you saw me running around that night, but how the fuck did you wipe my memories?” Tommy asked, finally putting a voice to the question that had been burning in his mind for ages now. “Shit- *why* did you even wipe my memories?”

Dream stared at him for a moment without saying anything, and Tommy could feel Cordyceps and Punz’s eyes on him as well.

He didn’t care though. The anger was burning in his chest again, and the dam inside of him cracked as all his ugly emotions began to spill out.

“Did you just wanna fuckin’ brainwash me and make me fight against the Syndicate for shits and giggles?” Tommy asked, pushing to his feet. “You took me away from my fucking family and then you made me fight against them for your own sick games! You turned me into a complete stranger, and even with most of my memories back I still don’t recognize myself in the goddamn mirror!” He was shouting now, and although Punz was staring at him with a clear warning in his eyes, he couldn’t bring himself to stop. “Why the hell couldn’t you just kidnap and interrogate me?! Nothing makes any sense anymore and I feel like I’m losing my fucking mind! Is this what’s funny to you? Do you enjoy seeing me like this, Dream?!?”

Tommy hadn’t even realized how loud he was until he stopped yelling, his throat raw as he gasped for air. Everything inside of him was burning. His chest, his arms, his gut—fire was consuming him from the inside out, and he couldn’t tell if it made him want to scream or cry.

“Just—” Tommy gasped again, squeezing his eyes shut as he wrapped his arms as tightly as he could around himself. “Why? I wanna know why you did this to me.”

Silence smothered the room as Tommy stopped talking. Cordyceps had sat up straight now, and Tommy could just barely see his furrowed eyebrows above his goggles. Behind him,

Punz was holding his poker face, but Tommy noticed the slightest crease in his forehead.

Dream was as unreadable as he always was. But his head was tilted slightly to the side, like a dog that couldn't understand the command its owner was giving them.

"Why are you just staring at me?!" Tommy shouted, storming across the room so he was only a few feet away from the hero. "Just fucking tell me already! I'm sick of these games!"

Finally this is what seemed to jolt Dream out of his silence.

"I- I'm not playing a game with you," Dream said, and Tommy was surprised to hear that there was no smugness in his tone. "I'm just- you think *I'm* the reason you lost your memories?"

Dream was confused. He wasn't being condescending.

"I mean... you kidnapped me and I lost all my memories of my time with the Syndicate. Of course it had to be you!"

"Tommy, how the fuck would I erase your memories?" Dream asked, sounding even more taken back than Tommy was. "I have illusion powers, not mind manipulation. I genuinely have no clue how I could induce amnesia in someone."

...what?

"Then how the hell did I lose my memories?"

"I mean, I didn't see it myself, but when I spotted you running through the city I started following you. At one point though, you ran into the slums and I lost track of where you were. When I found you you were passed out in an alleyway, all your pockets were turned out, and you had a nasty head wound. To me, all the signs pointed to a mugging."

A mugging.

This whole time, his lost memories had just been... an accident?

Tommy didn't want to believe it, but the more he thought about it, the more sense it made. He couldn't remember the night in much detail, but there were flashes he could make out.

Running down the street, anger heating his blood and making him want to punch something.

Hearing footsteps behind him, getting paranoid and doubling back a few times to make sure he wasn't being followed.

Ducking into an alleyway to hide, finding himself face to face with two burly-looking men he didn't recognize.

He didn't want to hand over his phone because then he'd have no way to contact his family.

Pain. So much pain as he was slammed into a wall and felt his head connect with the brick in just the wrong spot.

That was it. The next thing he remembered was waking up to Dream crouching over him, looking just as confused as he was as a jackhammer pounded inside his skull.

“You didn’t- You had no idea-”

“Nope. When you woke up I was going to start questioning you for the identities of the Syndicate, and then you didn’t know what year it was and I realized that I had a bit of a problem on my hands,” Dream explained, pushing back the hair that had fallen over his mask. “But then I also realized that problems come with new opportunities. I decided to tell you that the Syndicate kidnapped you because, again, you could’ve been kidnapped for all I knew. And I thought that if I could make you hate the Syndicate, if you saw all the terrible shit they do firsthand, by the time you got your memories back you’d *want* to tell me their identities.”

So Dream had been manipulating him. But he hadn’t been the one to take away his memories. He just saw an opportunity presented to him and decided to take it.

“You hid me from the rest of the Hero Tower and turned me into your sidekick so you could fucking manipulate me into hating my own family?” Tommy whispered, unsure if the fire was sputtering out, or if it was growing to unfathomable heights inside of him.

“Look, I had no idea they were your family,” Dream said, raising his hands in mock surrender. “But c’mon, you can’t really be *that* upset with me, right?”

Tommy gave Dream an incredulous look. “Wh- Of course I’m fucking upset!”

“Now Tommy,” Dream crooned, reaching out to rest a hand on the side of his head. “You saw what the Syndicate does with your own eyes. You saw how many people got hurt because of them, and how we’re just trying to protect innocent people. Are you saying none of that matters? That you’re okay with being part of a family of murderers?”

Clenching his jaw, Tommy smacked Dream’s hand away from him. “Don’t fucking touch me!” He snarled. “Of course it matters! But they’re- they’re still my family, Dream!”

Moving his hand back to his side, Dream did the head tilt at him again. “So what, you’re a villain now?”

Tommy shook his head. “No, I’m not a fucking villain! But I’m not just gonna go oh yeah fuck them they’re all terrible people—I can’t do that now!”

“Tommy, come on, there’s only two sides to this war,” Dream told him, his voice dropping to something dangerously low. “You’re either a hero or a villain. There’s no neutral side when the lives of innocent people hang in the balance.”

Swallowing down a lump in his throat, Tommy stumbled back as Dream took a step towards him.

“Are you a murderer, Lucid?” Dream whispered. “Are you going to kill innocents in the name of loyalty to your ‘family’? Or do you care about doing the right thing? About helping the people who don’t deserve to be dragged into this war?”

Tommy *did* care. He cared so much it was tearing his entire sense of identity in half. He couldn’t stop himself from caring, but he so desperately wished he could because that would make everything so much easier.

He cared about the innocent people the Syndicate hurt. But he also cared about Phil, and Techno—he cared about Tubbo, Ranboo, Niki, Jack, Sam, Puffy, Ponk, and even Quackity. The love he had for all of them burnt so strongly inside of him that it felt like it was in constant battle with the compassion and care he held for all the civilians he’d seen get hurt during his time as a hero. The innocents who cried out for help, versus the terrorists that stood stone-faced in the wake of their screams.

And then there was Wilbur. Wilbur, who Tommy thought of separately from the rest of the Syndicate, and even separate from Phil and Techno. Because Phil was his dad, and Techno was his brother just like Wilbur was, but Wilbur was... different.

Wilbur, who didn’t approve of what the Syndicate did, but stayed because of how much he loved Phil and Techno. Wilbur, who had desperately tried to keep Tommy out of the Syndicate’s business, because he didn’t want Tommy to get sucked in like he did.

The idea of letting go of his family was like a dagger being stabbed straight through his heart, because even if they only loved the old Tommy and not the Tommy he was now, he still loved them so much.

But he couldn’t even conceptualize letting go of Wilbur. Tommy wondered how the hell Wilbur had survived all those months without him, because the idea of separating himself from his brother was like trying to imagine cutting himself in half. They were fused together like some strange, four-legged amalgamation. Two broken halves that have to combine to make a whole. And while that might not necessarily have been a good thing, it was what they were.

“I’m not a murderer, but I’m not a hero either, Dream,” Tommy spat, stepping forward to shove his finger into Dream’s chest. “If you think I’m ever going to work with you again after you lied to me and twisted me into a complete stranger just so I could be your little fuckin’ shadow—you got another thing coming, buddy.”

Dream was silent for a moment, and Tommy wondered if Dream could hear how loudly his heart was beating in his chest.

Then, Dream’s hand wrapped around Tommy’s wrist, and Tommy gasped as Dream twisted his hand to the side, sending blinding pain racing up his arm.

“You’re not leaving again, Lucid,” Dream hissed, tightening his grip on Tommy’s hand and making him whimper as he felt his bones creak under the pressure. If Dream twisted his hand any further back, he was going to break his wrist. “I meant it when I said you were *mine*.”

“Fuck you!” Tommy snapped. “I’m not telling you shit about the Syndicate! I’d rather die!”

“Is that so? We’ll see how strong that resolve of yours is soon,” Dream said, loosening the grip he had on Tommy’s wrist. “Cordyceps, can you?”

“I got it,” Cordyceps said. Then, before Tommy could make sense of what was happening, he felt Cordyceps hand wrap around the one Dream wasn’t grabbing.

Tommy stiffened as something both hot and cold at the same time rushed through him. Shivers ran down his spine as he felt warmth bloom in the hand Cordyceps was holding, and before he could try to rip his hand away, he looked down and saw a mushroom growing out of his skin.

Oh fuck.

“Lucid, go sit down in that chair over there,” Cordyceps ordered, pointing to one of the dining room chairs that Punz had dragged over when Tommy wasn’t looking.

Tommy opened his mouth to tell him to fuck off, but that same hot and cold feeling washed over him again. He felt his limbs moving on their own, and glanced down to see the orange mushroom on his hand pulsing as darker orange veins spread up his arm.

Shit. Fuck. He’d heard about Cordyceps’ mind-controlling fungi before, but this was the first time he’d actually seen it in action.

His limbs were stiff as he hobbled over to the chair. Anytime he tried to resist the order, the mushroom on his hand pulsed, and that same hot-cold rush would force him to keep moving. He sat down in the chair, and Punz wasted no time in tying his hands behind the back of the chair with some plastic zip ties. Then, he tied Tommy’s ankles to the chair as well, and Tommy felt the hot-cold rush fade away.

The stiffness left his body all at once, and Tommy remembered that Cordyceps’ power could only last for a minute or so at most. From the corner of his eye, he noticed the mushroom on his hand fall to the floor.

Slumping against the chair, Tommy glared at Dream and Cordyceps. “I’m still not gonna fucking say anything, dipshits.”

“Come on, *Lucid*, don’t make me the bad guy here,” Dream said, walking over to him with his arms folded over his chest. “I don’t want to hurt you. Genuinely, I don’t. But you’re forcing my hand with this.”

“I’m not forcing you to do anything. But if you’re gonna torture me or whatever the fuck then go ahead and do it. You won’t get me to talk.”

Dream hummed, and stepped closer so he was right in front of Tommy. A rock dropped into his gut as Dream reached a hand out to rest on top of his head. He was silent for a moment, dragging his fingers through Tommy’s hair, and Tommy was planning to try and bite him the second he put his hand near his mouth.

Suddenly, the fingers carding through his hair paused, and pain flashed through his scalp as Dream yanked Tommy's hair.

"Tell me the identities of the Syndicate," Dream hissed, bending down so his mask was only inches from Tommy's nose.

"What was even your long term plan, Dream? When the Syndicate started looking for me, you knew they weren't going to stop until they got me back. What the hell did you even think was gonna happen?" Tommy challenged, glaring at the mask.

Dream paused, and the hand grabbing his hair loosened its grip.

"My plan was to try and get you to realize how monstrous the Syndicate really was," Dream told him after a beat.

"And what if my memories came back and I didn't think like that? What if my memories came back and you found out I had a grudge against heroes or something? What would you have done then?"

Despite the mask covering his face, Tommy could practically feel the scowl Dream was giving him.

"Did you even have a real plan?" Tommy asked before Dream could respond. "Did you actually think anything through? Or did you just think to yourself 'wow, this guy who was probably part of the Syndicate has amnesia, I'm gonna manipulate and lie to him and make him fight against the Syndicate. Surely there's no way this can go wrong?'"

Another beat of silence passed as Dream stared blankly at him. Even though this was an extremely dangerous situation for him to be in, Tommy couldn't stop the laughter bubbling up in his chest as the realization dawned on him.

"You had no fucking clue what you were doing," Tommy giggled, his eyes going wide. "That's why you couldn't seem to decide if you wanted me to remember or not. You didn't have a plan at all. The only thing you knew was that I had amnesia, and wanted to try and use it against the Syndicate, but had no goddamn idea how to actually do that."

The fingers twisted into his hair again, and Tommy's laughter was cut off by the hot flash of pain that followed it.

"Shut the fuck up, Lucid!" Dream yelled, yanking his head up to meet the eyes of his mask. "You're not the one asking the questions here, I am. And I want to know the identities of Thanatos, Acheron, and Orpheus."

Tommy's lips spread into the most saccharine smile he could muster. "Go to hell."

Dream took a deep breath at that, and Tommy braced himself for a slap in the face.

Instead of hitting him though, Dream moved his hand down from his hair and cupped the side of his face.

“No, I think you are.”

Then, before Tommy could snap his head to the side to bite his hand, everything went dark.

It was like someone had put a bag over his head, except he could still feel Dream’s hand on his face. His eyes were wide open, but the room was pitch black. When he tried to wriggle his arms against their restraints, he realized he couldn’t feel his limbs either.

“Hello?” He called out into the blackness. “Where the hell am I?!”

Dream’s laughter echoed all around him in the void.

“I don’t know, Lucid. You tell me,” Dream crooned, and Tommy felt Dream’s thumb brush over his cheek. “What are you seeing in there?”

Oh.

Dream was using his fear illusion on him. He was trapping Tommy in a prison of his own mind to torment him into confessing the Syndicate’s identities.

The darkness wasn’t just like normal darkness. It was living. A breathing, pulsing mass all around him. It pressed in on him from every side, and Tommy desperately wished that he could feel his limbs right now.

“D-Dream, stop this,” Tommy yelled, his own voice echoing back at him. “I’m not gonna tell you, so just let me out!”

“Hm, I don’t think so,” the omnipotent voice of Dream said in reply, the words falling onto his shoulders and shoving him deeper into the darkness. “Not until you tell me what I want to know.”

Tommy’s breathing was picking up speed. The darkness was suffocating. It was like a blanket wrapping around him, but there was nothing warm inside of it. It swaddled him in its icy embrace, sending shivers up his spine and turning every part of his body except for his face completely numb.

Looking down, he tried to see his hands but couldn’t. He had no body. No physical presence. It was just him and the darkness, all alone.

“Your breathing is picking up speed,” Dream pointed out. “Are you getting scared?”

“Shut the fuck up!” Tommy shouted, although his words wavered.

He wasn’t actually trapped in the void. He had to remind himself of that. He was in Dream’s apartment, tied to a chair, and Dream was using his powers on him.

This wasn’t real. The darkness was an illusion.

He knew this. He *knew* this. But the void pressed down on his lungs, forcing its way into his throat and consuming him from the inside out. It was just so empty. He was nowhere. He was

nothing.

Tommy couldn't breathe. The darkness was too heavy. Too much. The hand on his face felt so distant now. Was this what death felt like? Just eternity trapped in the void?

"Let me out!" Tommy screamed, his chest rising and falling in rapid gasps. "Please!"

"You know what you need to tell me, Tommy," Dream reminded him. "Just three names. That's all I need."

No. No no no. He couldn't give Dream the names. He couldn't keep Tommy trapped in this void forever but it already felt like so much time had passed. Time wasn't real. It was passing slowly, quickly, seconds felt like hours and hours felt like seconds. Tommy wasn't sure how long he'd been in the darkness for, but it was far too long for his liking.

Suddenly, the darkness shifted.

It was still pulsing. It twisted around him, burying him deeper and deeper in its cocoon forcing itself down his throat. But there was something else now. Another sound. A sharp, blaring horn.

Tommy's heart dropped when he realized it was a train whistle.

"Huh, you're hearing a train just like Orpheus did," Dream muttered. "Are you seeing the same thing he did?"

The darkness was moving and fading now. Blacks shifted into deep blues and vibrant reds. Tommy's breath caught in his throat as the train station came into view.

Sharp shadows danced across the tiled walls, twisting and pulsing just like the void he'd been trapped in. Vibrant blue paint was splashed all over the place, and Tommy winced when he saw handprints smeared over the tiles. As if someone had clawed at the walls over and over again, trying to escape.

Tommy was standing on the platform, and the train whistle was getting louder. It was deafening, screaming in his ears and drowning out anything else around him. A rush of wind slammed against him as a train sped by, bright red light flashing from inside as it disappeared down the opposite tunnel.

There was the sound of a soft whimper, and Tommy jolted when he noticed the small figure sitting on the floor.

A kid. There was a kid that couldn't have been older than eleven or twelve sitting on the platform, his back pressed against the wall and hugging his knees against his chest. His skin was so washed out, it almost looked grey, with the only color on him being the bright blue paint staining his fingers.

"Hello?" Tommy called out, taking a step closer.

The kid didn't look up, didn't even acknowledge that Tommy said anything. Now, Tommy could see that the kid was transparent, and he was flickering in and out of visibility.

"Hey? Can you hear me?" Tommy asked, crouching down right in front of the kid.

There was another quiet whimper, and the kid's shoulders began to tremble.

"I wanna go home," he whispered, his voice so soft that Tommy almost thought he imagined it. "I wanna go home, I wanna go home, I wanna—" he cut himself off with a shuddering breath, lifting his head right as another train blared through the tunnel behind them.

Tommy froze the minute he saw the kid's face. Dark, curly hair fell over his forehead, and warm brown eyes met Tommy's own right as he realized who he was seeing.

Wilbur. This was Wilbur but... young?

Even though he was staring right at Tommy, Wilbur didn't seem to see him. His gaze cut right through Tommy, instead watching the train pass by with the kind of exhaustion in his eyes that you would expect to see in a war-hardened veteran. Not a child.

There was a flash of red light as the train disappeared down the tunnel again, and Wilbur's form flickered. Then, in the blink of an eye, he was different.

Wilbur was an adult now. He was curled up in the same way, hugging his knees to his chest and pressed against the wall so hard it was as if he was trying to melt right into it. He was completely transparent, his skin looking more like ash than anything else. Dark circles hung under his eyes, and his fingers were still stained with that strange blue paint.

There were no tears like when he had been young. Instead, this Wilbur just seemed... hollow. He stared at nothing. His eyes were blank, his expression was slack, and Tommy felt like he was going to be sick the longer he looked at him.

"Wi-"

"C'mon Tommy, tell me, what's going on in there?" Dream's taunting voice called out from above.

Shit. Dream.

Tommy was jolted back to the reality of his situation. This wasn't real. He was still trapped in Dream's illusion hellscape, and for some reason he was seeing Wilbur's train station. But why was Wilbur here?

Obviously this wasn't the real Wilbur. Dream had said the mind creates its own fear landscape, which meant that Tommy's fears must somehow be related to Wilbur.

Tommy wanted to call out to his brother so badly right now. He wanted to say his name, to try and get him to look at Tommy, to tell him he wasn't alone. Because this wasn't the real Wilbur, but *god* he looked like him. Even with the blank stare and flickering skin, this looked like Wilbur, and Wilbur was so horribly sad right now.

This was where Wilbur would go if he died again. He would be trapped in this dark, cold train station all by himself. His brother would flicker in and out of existence for all eternity, forced to watch trains pass by that he could never get on. Stuck in transit but never going anywhere.

Reaching out, Tommy expected his hand to pass right through Wilbur's transparent one, but he was surprised to find that wasn't the case. The hand felt cold as ice, but it was solid in his own. Wilbur didn't react as Tommy curled their fingers together, just kept staring at nothing with those hollowed out eyes.

"Please say something," Tommy whispered. "Please, anything. It's me. It's Tommy."

The hand was limp in his own. Tommy almost wished that he hadn't been able to touch him, because at least then he wouldn't be taunted with the knowledge that he could feel and see Wilbur, but Wilbur still thought he was all alone.

The light flashed again, and Tommy jumped when two more figures appeared beside Wilbur.

Neither of them were see-through like Wilbur was. But both Phil and Techno had the same, hollow expression on their faces. Techno's face was streaked with blood, while Phil's feathers had fallen out all around him like black snow.

Letting go of Wilbur's hand, Tommy crawled over to put his hand on Techno's cheek. The blood was warm against his palm, but Techno didn't see him. Didn't say a word.

"What is this?" Tommy whispered, his throat closing up as tears burned behind his eyes.

Techno didn't give him a reply. Just kept staring straight through him.

Moving down to Phil, Tommy reached out to brush the few feathers still left on his wings. They were mangled, burnt and smoking like he'd been caught in an explosion. Phil's face was gaunt, and Tommy's heart clenched at how there was no color left in his irises.

"I- I can't do this," Tommy said, scrambling backwards as the sobs began to make his chest heave. "I can't- I don't want to see this!"

His family was dead. They were dead and staring at him with hollow eyes. They weren't there. They were there but they weren't and they were gone-

"You can stop it at any time," Dream told him. "Just say the three magic words."

No. No, he couldn't do that, because then Dream would kill his family and this train station would be their reality.

But he couldn't stay here any longer. He was going to go crazy if he had to stare at the dead souls of his family for a second more. He was panicking now, and the train whistle was getting louder once again.

"What if-?" Tommy's breathing hitched as he tried to steady himself. "What if I tell you who Asphodel is?!"

It was a last ditch effort, but if Tommy admitted to being part of the Syndicate, Dream could arrest him with that. Maybe, just maybe, he would be satisfied with him. Him and no one else in the Syndicate.

He had to try. Anything to get out of that hell.

Dream didn't say anything, but the train station disappeared in the blink of an eye. Tommy jolted, gasping as Dream's hand pulled away from his face. Whipping his head around, his heart pounded in his ears as he saw he was back in the apartment.

Zip ties cut into his wrists and ankles. He was back.

A sob of relief bubbled up from his chest. Bending over, Tommy heaved out panicked breaths as tears dripped from his nose, not wanting to close his eyes again for fear of being trapped in either the darkness or the train station again.

"That bad, huh?" Dream asked after a few moments.

Lifting his head, Tommy scowled when his eyes met Dream's smiling mask. "Yeah, it's fucking bad."

"Well, if you don't wanna go there again, then I'd recommend you tell me who Asphodel is," Dream said, clapping his hands together.

Tommy took a shaky breath, forcing himself to sit back up. This was it. If he told Dream he was part of the Syndicate, that alone could be grounds for Dream to arrest him.

It was either that or stare into the blank eyes of his dead family again. Tommy couldn't do that.

"Fine, you wanna know Asphodel's identity?" Tommy asked, glaring at Dream. "It's me. I'm Asphodel. That's my name in the Syndicate."

Dream stared at him for a moment in silence. Tommy's blood roared in his ears as his breaths slowed.

Then, Dream began to laugh.

It was sharp, high-pitched laughter. He clutched his stomach, tilting his head back to the ceiling as his laughter spread around the room, wrapping around Tommy like a vice. It was a cruel and mocking kind of laugh. One that made Tommy shrink back in his chair as shame crept up on his face.

"That's it? That's your big reveal?" Dream asked, the laughter ringing clear in his voice. "Why the hell would I care that you're Asphodel? I already have you with me! You're not even a threat!"

Tommy grit his teeth. He wasn't a threat. He meant nothing to Dream in the grand scheme of things.

The truth was, Tommy had only ever been a tool for Dream. An amnesiac kid he'd stumbled across by chance and realized he could use to try and get to the Syndicate. Dream had never actually cared about him. All he'd ever wanted were his memories.

The Syndicate only wanted Asphodel. Dream wanted Lucid with the memories of his former life.

No one wanted him as he was now. They only wanted the person he'd been before.

No one wanted *Tommy*.

His shoulders shook as his thoughts began to spiral. Even though Tommy loved Phil and Techno, they couldn't love him because he wasn't theirs. Wilbur shouldn't love him either, but he did anyway. For some reason Tommy couldn't understand, Wilbur cared about him despite the fact that he wasn't the same as he was before.

Fuck, he missed Wilbur.

He hoped Wilbur wasn't too worried about him, though knowing him he was probably panicking. Shit. Tommy really hoped Wilbur wasn't panicking too much. Though knowing the Syndicate, they probably started gearing up as soon as Wilbur showed them the note.

"Lucid." Dream's voice cut back into his thoughts, and Tommy jolted upright when Dream took a step closer to him. "Either you tell me the names I need, or I'm sending you back to whatever train station you were at."

Tommy stiffened. He couldn't go back. He couldn't see them again. Not like that.

"Please Dream," Tommy whispered, shrinking back in the chair. "Please don't."

Dream reached his hand out again, this time resting it on Tommy's shoulder.

"You have five seconds. Five,"

"Dream c'mon-"

"Four."

"I- I can't tell you! Please-"

"Three."

"Dream please, I'm begging you, don't-"

Suddenly, the sound of knocking echoed through the apartment, and Dream's countdown halted.

Cordyceps and Punz both stiffened, while Dream's hand dropped from Tommy's shoulder. He let out a sigh of relief at the loss of contact, letting his eyes dart to the door as he wondered who it could be.

Dream looked to Punz, who walked over to stand next to Tommy's chair. Then, Punz nodded, and Dream slowly walked towards the door.

The tension in the room was so thick, it was difficult to take deep breaths. Tommy's blood was still racing, and he struggled against his ties until Punz gave him a sharp look that was a clear warning.

Dream crept to the front door, pausing for just a moment before he cracked it open. It was so eerily reminiscent of the time Hellion had stopped by and Dream didn't want him to see Tommy's face. A moment that in retrospect Tommy now could see was incredibly suspicious on Dream's end. Fuck. Tommy had really been oblivious.

Except this time, it wasn't Hellion on the other side of the door.

"Wh- Gamble, what are you doing here?" Dream asked, sounding completely taken back.

Gamble.

Tommy couldn't stop a wide smile from stretching across his face.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact when I came up with this au like all the way back in november one of the first things I decided on was that tommy lost his memories just getting fucking mugged in an alleyway so imagine my surprise when I saw everyone in my comments theorizing to hell and back how dream erased his memories

yeah that wasn't a lie or anything dream legit had nothing to do with tommy's amnesia
LMAO

anyway, I really hope you guys aren't too disappointed by that! the next chapter is gonna be a LOT of fun so hopefully I can crank that out soon

OKAY NOW SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT TIME! I'VE STARTED MY NEXT BIG FIC! if you like my writing and want to see more of it after this fic ends, well have I got good news for you! I've just posted the first chapter of my next big project, [the stars and their children](#), which is a crimeboys-centric sbi space royalty au inspired by Dune. it's got a whole lot of worldbuilding, a bit of fun politics, and plenty of crimeboys for you all. please go check it out! I'm not going to start updating it regularly until world forgetting ends, so go subscribe now so you can find out when I start updating it!

anyway I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

there's a playlist for this fic and it's a banger! check it out [here](#)

please let me know what you thought about this chapter down in the comments! again, I'm a bit nervous to post this, so I really hope it's not a disappointment or anything. this has been planned since the start so it wasn't an intentional plot twist to throw you all off lol

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

love you all <3

the price of vengeance

Chapter Summary

It's time for a rescue mission.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone it's me i'm backkkkk

god we're almost at the end of this fic! it's insane! it feels like only a little while ago I was posting the first chapter of this, and now here we are! thank you all so so much for all the love and support you've given this story as its gone on, you all have been so kind and I really hope you've enjoyed this ride as much as I have

this chapter is really long. like, 10k words. a lot of shit goes down so I really hope you guys enjoy it

TWs for usual violence stuff

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was a beat of silence that felt like it lasted five years after Dream said Gamble's name.

From where Tommy was sitting, he couldn't see Quackity's face. But he could imagine the clown mask standing on the other side of the door, probably smiling under his mask. Quackity had to know he was in here. If the Syndicate had told him about Tommy going back to Dream, then it was obvious that Quackity would be the one responsible for getting him out since he had access to the Hero Tower.

The only question now was *how* he was going to get Tommy out.

"I just came to check in, man. See how you were doing and all," Quackity replied after several seconds of silence.

Tommy noticed how Dream's shoulders went rigid at this. "I'm doing fine, Gamble. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Aw c'mon, don't play with me. You've been acting weird ever since Lucid got taken, and I don't blame you. I'm sure you're stressed as hell trying to find him," Quackity said, putting just a tad too much emphasis on the last bit for it to be genuine, but Tommy knew only he would pick up on that.

“Well, yeah, of course I’m stressed. But I’m managing,” Dream told him.

“You’ve been isolating yourself in your apartment for weeks, you know?” Quackity pointed out.

Dream nodded. “I’m trying to put my full focus into finding Lucid. Can’t afford to be distracted by anything else.”

Fucking liar.

“Of course, man. If you need any help, you know the rest of us at the Tower have your back.” Tommy almost laughed at the irony of Quackity saying that, but managed to keep his mouth shut.

“Yeah, I know,” Dream muttered, and Tommy found himself getting pissed off at the fake sadness in his voice. “I appreciate it, Gamble. Really. But for now I think I just need to be alone, y’know?”

He was trying to end the conversation. Shit.

“I’m sure, don’t worry. I won’t take up too much time. I just also came by because I, uh, *heard some weird noises* coming from up here,” he said, emphasizing the part about hearing strange things just a little too much. “I live right below you, and I could’ve sworn I heard some loud banging. I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

Oh shit. Tommy knew what Quackity wanted him to do.

“HELP M-”

Punz seemed to catch Tommy’s realization as soon as it crossed his face, but Tommy still managed to get out a single word before Punz slammed a hand over his mouth.

Except this entire time, Tommy had been waiting for someone to get their hand too close to his mouth. Because if he knew how to do one thing, it was how to use his teeth.

Tommy bit down on Punz’s fingers as hard as he could, until the taste of iron flooded over his tongue. Punz screamed and ripped his hand away, with Tommy spitting the hunter’s blood onto the carpet.

“HELP ME! GAMBLE HELP ME I’M IN HERE!” Tommy shouted, spit and blood dripping from his chin.

“What the fuck is that?” Quackity shouted, and Tommy could see Dream struggling to keep him from opening the door.

“Gamble, stay the fuck out of this,” Dream hissed while Cordyceps got to his feet to try and help Dream with the door.

“No!” There was a loud *bang!*, and Dream and Cordyceps both stumbled backwards as the door was kicked open.

For a brief second, Tommy found himself staring into the eyes of Quackity's clown mask. But before he could say anything, Punz was grabbing him again, and suddenly there was something sharp being pressed to his throat.

A rock dropped into his stomach. There was a quiet gasp from Quackity, while Dream and Cordyceps both froze in place.

"Everyone, shut the fuck up!" Punz shouted, holding a knife right against Tommy's throat. "No one moves, or the kid gets it."

"Punz," Dream said carefully, holding his hands out like he was trying to calm a wild animal, "what the fuck are you doing?"

"You said no other heroes were gonna show up. I'm not about to get arrested because you're an idiot," Punz hissed, and Tommy flinched when he felt the cold metal brush against his skin.

"You're not gonna get arrested," Dream told him, taking a careful step towards them both. "I can handle this. Just put the knife down."

"*Can* you handle this? Because I really doubt that, Dream," Punz scoffed. "The kid was right. You have no clue what the hell you're doing. I was going along with this because of how much you were paying me, but you really have no clue the shit you've gotten yourself into."

Tommy's heart was beating so loudly in his ears, it was almost drowning out Punz's words. He struggled against the zip ties his wrists were bound with, but quickly stopped when the blade moved closer to his throat.

Shit. Fuck. This wasn't supposed to happen. Dream looked like he was on the verge of losing his shit, Cordyceps and Quackity were both frozen like they weren't sure what to do, and then there was the impression of a shoe in the carpet-

Wait, what?

Dream was saying something to Punz, but Tommy wasn't paying attention anymore. Instead, all he could focus on were the imprints of shoes against the carpet that were creeping towards him. Punz hadn't noticed, and neither had anyone else in the room, but it was clear there was someone invisible walking towards him right now.

Wilbur could go invisible, but he wasn't corporeal when he did that. He just phased through objects, and wouldn't leave footprints on the floor.

The footsteps got closer. Punz was yelling at Dream now, and Tommy whimpered when he felt a sharp sting on his throat. A drop of blood slithered down his neck and onto his shoulder, and Tommy grit his teeth to keep from moving even the slightest bit.

"I want out of this contract!" Punz shouted. "Give me the money you owe me, and I'm leaving. I don't want any part in this anymore!"

"Okay, that's fine," Dream said gently, still holding out his hands. "I'll pay you and you can go. But you need to move the knife away from Lucid's throat."

Punz narrowed his eyes at Dream. "Give me your word?"

Dream nodded. "I give you my word."

There was a beat of silence. Seconds ticked by like hours, and Tommy's chest was rising and falling in shallow gasps as he tried not to move anymore than he had to.

Then, Punz let out a sigh.

"Okay."

Then, a lot happened all at once.

The knife moved away from Tommy's throat.

The footsteps appeared in front of the chair.

There was a loud grunt behind Tommy, and he twisted his head around to see Punz get knocked over by the invisible figure.

The knife fell from Punz's hand, sliding across the wood floors and straight to Quackity's shoes.

Lifting the mask from his face, Quackity smiled at Tommy.

"Thoth! Seshat! Now!"

Eret and Foolish—who apparently had been standing out of view of the doorway behind Quackity the entire time—both sprinted inside the apartment. Quackity shapeshifted armored scales to cover his hands and face, while his fingers extended into deadly claws.

"Wh- Gamble, what the-"

Before Dream could finish his sentence, Eret lifted one hand in the air, and it felt like all the air in the room was being sucked out at once. Tommy gasped as his back arched, with Dream, Cordyceps, and Punz all suffering the same as he was. Then, Eret dropped their hand, and as the air rushed back into Tommy's lungs, everything was plunged into darkness.

It wasn't the same darkness as when Dream had been using his illusions on him. Tommy could see about a foot in front of him, but he had no idea what was going on with the others. He could hear yelling, but it was like there was a pitch black fog settled over most of the room.

Before he could panic about it though, he felt something tugging on the zip ties that were binding his wrists together. There was the sound of snapping, and suddenly the ties went slack. There was a floating knife behind him, and Tommy watched as it moved to cut the ties on his ankles as well.

Once he was free from the chair, Tommy fell to his knees. The invisible figure caught him, sitting him up and shoving a small vial in his hand.

“Drink that,” Reynard—*Fundy*—whispered to him.

Fuck. That was right. Fundy could turn invisible. That’s why he was so good at stealing stuff for Las Nevadas to sell on the black market.

Glancing down at the vial Fundy had given him, Tommy saw a glittering gold liquid inside of it. It was a thin vial, holding only a tiny amount of the drink, and it had a small cork stopper on the top.

In the darkness, Tommy heard Dream yell, and suddenly there was a blinding ray of light shooting through the fog. Tommy had no idea who it was directed at, but he heard a pained yell that sounded like Dream, so he imagined Foolish had just burnt Dream with it.

Pulling out the cork, Tommy downed the liquid like a shot. It tasted sweet, and vaguely like milk, but he only thought about the taste for a moment before it went into effect. The fog cleared all at once. Tommy blinked as he took in the state of the room, and realized that Quackity, Eret, and Foolish were fighting Dream, Cordyceps, and Punz.

It was almost sad to see Dream and Punz stumbling around half-blind, while Cordyceps hung to the back of the room. At one point, Eret kicked Punz in the chest and he fell backwards, landing right at Cordyceps’ feet.

Immediately, Cordyceps knelt down and placed a hand on the side of Punz’s face.

“Protect me!”

Tommy watched a much larger orange mushroom than the one that had grown on his hand sprout from Punz’s cheek, and his eyes glazed over as he scrambled to his feet, pushing Cordyceps behind him with one arm.

“We need to get out of here!” Fundy whisper-shouted to him, still invisible as he tugged on Tommy’s wrist.

Nodding, Tommy struggled to his feet, his legs having gone numb from being tied to the chair. Fundy looped an arm around his shoulders, and Tommy leaned against him as they started to make their way to the door.

Eret and Punz were fighting again, although this time Punz’s fighting was far more offensive than it had been before. He was speeding around Eret, swiping at them with another knife that he must’ve had hidden on him, pushing them away from Cordyceps who was still pressed against the wall. Meanwhile, Dream and Quackity seemed to be going head to head, with Dream winning despite Eret’s blindness effect.

As soon as Dream slammed Quackity against the wall, Foolish lifted a golden staff in his hand that Tommy hadn’t been able to see until now. Beside him, Fundy suddenly flickered back into visibility, fox mask and all, and slammed a hand over Tommy’s eyes.

“Turn away!” Fundy yelled.

Both of them turned around right as Foolish slammed the staff into the ground, and despite Fundy’s hand over his eyes, the light that shone behind his eyelids was painfully bright. He heard several shouts of pain, and after some of the longest seconds of his life, the light faded.

The hand dropped from his face. Blinking open his eyes, Tommy saw that Dream, Cordyceps, and Punz were all stunned, blinking and stumbling around with no particular direction. Dream had let go of Quackity, and even Quackity seemed a bit out of it as Foolish rushed to his side to guide him towards the door. The only one who seemed completely unaffected by the light blast was Eret, who reached a hand out to Tommy as soon as they saw him and Fundy get to their feet.

“Asphodel, we need to get you out of here,” Eret said, wrapping an arm around Tommy’s shoulder and hurrying to the door. “They’ll be stunned for at least a minute, so we need to get out while we can.”

Glancing behind him, Tommy saw that Dream still seemed completely out of it, and let out a soft sigh of relief.

“Yeah, let’s please get the fuck out of here.”

The group slammed the door to Dream’s apartment behind them as they rushed to the elevators. Someone had been smart enough to press the ‘hold elevator’ button before the whole fight, so there was an open elevator waiting for them.

Once inside, Foolish pressed a button for the rooftop, and Tommy frowned.

“The roof?”

“That’s where your ride’s waiting for you,” Quackity told him, looking like he was coming back to himself after the light blast.

The doors pinged as they slid shut, and Tommy let out a breath of relief as he slumped against the wall. His ride. Did Quackity mean the Syndicate? Were they waiting for him up on the roof?

Tommy’s heart lurched at the thought of facing his family again. Especially Phil and Techno, considering he’d run out after admitting to them that he had his memories back. What were they going to say to him? Would they be mad?

Well, of course they’ll be mad. They’re probably going to be furious at him. Wilbur would probably be torn between being upset and relieved that he was okay, but Phil and Techno both were going to be absolutely pissed.

And they had every right to be, didn’t they? Because not only had Tommy been lying to them, but then he ran out, got himself kidnapped, and forced them to rescue him.

Wait. His rescuer.

“Quackity,” Tommy gasped, snapping his head back towards the man. “The Heroes- they’re gonna know that you’re working with-”

“I know, kid,” Quackity said, giving him a sad smile. “I knew what was gonna happen going in here, but I was the only one who had access to the Tower.”

Tommy frowned. “But Hourglass and Hellion are gonna find out who you are.”

Quackity shrugged. “This charade wasn’t gonna last forever. Luck never sticks around for long, so you need to know when to tap out before you draw a bad hand.”

He was outing himself as Gamble. Giving up the in he had with the Heroes to save Tommy. Something tight squeezed in his chest at that realization. That Quackity had always been trying to take care of him. Whether he was Lucid or Asphodel, it was always Quackity who did his best to look out for him.

“Thanks, Big Q,” Tommy muttered, stepping forward to hug him.

Quackity stiffened in surprise, but quickly relaxed, hugging Tommy tight and patting his head. “Of course, Tommy.”

The elevator doors dinged as they reached the rooftop. The doors slid open, and wind blasted through the elevator car. A chill ran down Tommy’s spine as he let go of Quackity, straightening up to see the roof itself.

The Hero Tower was one of the tallest buildings in the city. Skyscrapers glittered like stars, the expanse of black above their heads blurring as it melted into the orange lights on the horizon. Wind whipped Tommy’s hair around his face, and he wrapped his arms around himself as Quackity guided him out of the elevator.

As soon as Tommy’s boots crunched against the gravel of the rooftop, he spotted them.

Standing at the opposite end of the roof were Phil, Techno, and Wilbur. They were donning their full villain outfits, but even without seeing their faces, Tommy could feel all of their eyes falling on him at the same time.

A fist squeezed his heart so tight, it made him want to cry out in pain. They were here. They really came for him.

“Tommy!” Wilbur yelled, already running towards him.

Shaking the hand Quackity had on his shoulder off, Tommy sprinted for his brother, slamming into Wilbur’s chest so hard that it sent both of them sprawling on the ground. They both grunted in pain, but Tommy barely even had a chance to get his bearings before Wilbur was sitting them both up and wrapping Tommy in a hug so tight, he wasn’t sure where he ended and Wilbur began.

“I’m sorry,” Tommy gasped, clutching onto Wilbur’s coat for dear life. “I’m sorry I left I-I just- I had to get answers and-”

“Don’t you ever do that again,” Wilbur snapped, although there was no real anger in his voice as he buried his face in Tommy’s hair. “You just- you left! With a tiny note telling me that you’d gone back to Dream and I was so fucking terrified-” he cut himself off, taking a shaky breath. The arms around him loosened, but Wilbur didn’t let go. “I just- thank the fucking stars you’re okay.”

“I’m sorry,” Tommy repeated, his voice muffled by Wilbur’s jacket.

He was sorry for scaring Wilbur, but sorry didn’t equal regret. Tommy had gotten all the answers he needed from Dream, and even if he was still just as confused about himself as he was before, at least he knew he didn’t want to go back to being Lucid.

Suddenly, Tommy’s attention was drawn away from his brother by the sound of footsteps approaching them both. Looking up from Wilbur’s shoulder, Tommy shuddered when he saw Phil and Techno both walking towards them, their expressions unreadable behind their masks.

A lump lodged itself in his throat like a rock, and Tommy had to fight to swallow it down.

“Wil, can you let go of him for a second?” Phil asked softly, crouching down next to the two of them on the ground.

Wilbur frowned. “Why?”

As much as Tommy didn’t want to let go of Wilbur, he also knew that he needed to face his dad and other brother eventually. So he pulled himself away, ignoring Wilbur’s sound of protest as he untangled himself from the other, shifting on the gravel so he was facing his father.

Phil stretched out a hand. Trembling, Tommy took it, and Phil pulled him up to his feet.

“Hey there,” Phil said softly after he dropped Tommy’s hand. “I think we have a lot to talk about when we get home.”

Tommy grit his teeth, shoving down the nausea rising up inside of him. “Yeah, we probably do.”

Despite the veil covering his face, Tommy could practically feel Phil’s frown.

“Do... Do you really remember everything?” Phil whispered.

Heart thundering in his ears, Tommy nodded.

Phil made some kind of wounded noise at that, and suddenly was reaching his clawed hand towards Tommy’s face. The movement was slow and cautious, hesitant in the same way Phil had been after Tommy tried to bite his hand so many months ago.

He cupped Tommy’s cheek, and Tommy tried not to lean into it. This wasn’t- it couldn’t be for him. This love. This affection. It wasn’t his. It was Phil mourning his lost son.

“I—”

Whatever Phil was going to say next was cut off by the sound of the elevator door dinging. Dropping the hand from Tommy’s cheek, Phil shoved Tommy behind him as they all spun around to face the elevator.

Techno stepped to the front of their group. Quackity, Fundy, Eret, and Foolish all tensed, forming a line in front of the family as the elevator doors slid open.

Unsurprisingly, Dream was standing in the elevator. Except it wasn’t just him.

There was Cordyceps on his left, which was to be expected. But then there was also Hellion on his right, Hourglass behind Hellion, Umbra behind Cordyceps, Felis at the very back—

And no Punz. The hunter was nowhere to be seen.

“I told you they were up here!” Dream shouted, running out of the elevator immediately. “Look, the Syndicate is trying to kidnap Lucid again! Up there!”

Umbra gasped as she rushed out behind Dream. “Oh my god! You’re right!”

Hellion, meanwhile, wasn’t looking at Tommy as he stepped out of the elevator. Instead, his eyes immediately fell on Quackity.

Oh no.

“You... You weren’t lying about—”

“No, I wasn’t, Hellion,” Dream said, cutting him off. “Gamble is here, and he’s working with Seshat, Thoth, and Reynard of Las Nevadas. They attacked me and Cordyceps inside my apartment and took Lucid right after we found him.”

Hourglass frowned at Quackity, but then looked up to face Tommy. “That’s Lucid?”

“Yes, that’s him,” Cordyceps said as Dream took a step forward.

“Thanatos!” Dream shouted, pearly white mask almost glittering in the moonlight pouring down on the rooftop. “I believe you have something of mine.”

The shift in Phil’s demeanor was immediate. His wings fluffed up, and his shoulders straightened as he took a step forward as well. Techno made a noise of protest and tried to pull him back, but Phil shoved his hand away and kept walking until he was only a few feet from Dream.

“Something of *yours*?” Phil asked, his voice dangerously low.

“Yes. My sidekick,” Dream told him, staring him down evenly. “Mine.”

Beside him, Wilbur looped an arm through his, tugging him close like he was ready to bolt with Tommy if things got ugly. Techno shifted so he was standing completely in front of

them both, as if he were a human shield.

"Anyone else think it's a little creepy that Dream is out here callin' a seventeen year old *his*?" Techno asked, his deadpan ringing out across the rooftop.

"Well, I wasn't gonna say it but—" Felis muttered, cutting himself off when Umbra shot him a dirty look.

"Wait, *seventeen*!?" Hellion hissed, narrowing his eyes.

Dream stiffened. "That's- Look, we can discuss that later—"

"You've had a seventeen year old sidekick this whole time?" Hellion asked, tearing his gaze away from Quackity to walk over to Dream. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Hellion, you can yell at me about this later. If I were you, I'd be more worried about the fact that your fucking traitorous boyfriend is working for Las Nevadas," Dream hissed, pointing at Quackity.

Quackity, who hadn't bothered to put his mask back on, shrunk under Hellion's gaze in a way Tommy had never seen him shrink back before. Tommy didn't blame him. The fire Hellion had blazing in his dark eyes was a terrifying thing to witness.

Meanwhile, Hourglass didn't seem angry at Quackity. If anything, he just looked... confused. His brows were furrowed, his gold eyes blinking rapidly as if he was trying to make sure he was seeing things right.

"Quackity?" Hellion asked, his voice hovering somewhere between bewildered and furious. "Is that true? Are you working with them?"

Clenching his jaw, Quackity took a breath before lifting his chin and facing Hellion head on. "Fine, you fucking caught me. What are you gonna do, Sapnap? You gonna arrest me right here?"

"Wh- What the *fuck*, Quackity!?" Sapnap exclaimed. "Why the hell are you working for Las Nevadas!?"

"Yeah Quackity, what's going on?" Hourglass chimed in, finally pulling himself from that confused daze and frowning at Quackity.

Quackity blinked, glancing between Sapnap and Hourglass as Foolish gripped his shoulder. "Karl, c'mon, don't be like that! You knew about this!"

Sapnap snapped his head to Hour- to *Karl*. "You knew!?"

"Wh- No, I didn't know! Of course I didn't!"

"You did though," Quackity tried to explain. "I told you ages ago and- and you forgot about it!"

"I'm pretty sure I wouldn't forget something as major as my boyfriend being a lying traitor," Karl hissed, narrowing his eyes.

Quackity flinched like he'd been slapped. "Karl, I swear I'm telling the truth."

"I don't even know what the truth is from you anymore!" Karl shot back, glaring at him.

"Who even are you?!" Sapnap demanded, his voice wavering.

There was a beat of silence as Quackity glanced between the two of them. Then, he took an unsteady breath, and Tommy's breath caught in his throat as he watched Quackity's face shift to reveal the scar he had as Dionysus.

His skin rippled and the scar blossomed out, sending both Sapnap and Karl stumbling back.

"Wh- You're-"

"Yup. I'm Dionysus, and I'm Gamble," Quackity said, cutting Sapnap off and wrapping his arms around himself.

Sapnap stared at Quackity in silence for a moment, breathing heavily as his hands curled into fists at his sides. A beat passed, and then another. Then,

"So nothing about you was true. Not even your face."

Quackity clenched his jaw.

"Guys, c'mon, just let me explain-"

"Stay the *fuck* away from him!" Sapnap hissed, turning to smoke and reappearing right in front of Quackity when he tried to take a step towards Karl.

The two stared each other down, Sapnap bristling like he was two seconds away from shoving Quackity off the roof, while Quackity looked like he was torn between wanting to shout at his partner, and wanting to scream.

While that was going on on one side of the roof, Dream and Phil were still having a silent staredown.

"So, like, do we have to witness this couple's argument or can we get going?" Techno asked, cutting off Quackity before he could say something else.

"You're not going anywhere," Dream snapped, pointing at Techno. "If you hand Lucid over to me without a fight, *maybe* I'll consider letting you all go for tonight. But either way, you're not leaving here with him."

Techno took a step towards Dream, while Wilbur tugged Tommy further back to the edge of the roof.

"*Asphodel* isn't going anywhere with you," Techno growled, unsheathing both his swords.

Asphodel. Lucid. Both names echoed in his mind over and over again, ringing so loudly in his ears it was driving him mad.

Dream laughed—a harsh, mocking sound that rang out like nails on a chalkboard. “He may have been Asphodel once, but he’s Lucid now. He belongs to me.”

Lucid. Lucid Lucid Lucid. Lucid belonged to Dream. Lucid was a hero. Lucid was the part of Tommy that cared about strangers, that didn’t want to hurt people unnecessarily.

“He doesn’t belong to you,” Phil cut in, wings arching high behind him. “He goes by Asphodel, and if you think you have more of a claim to my own *son* than I do then you are fucking delusional.”

Asphodel. Phil’s son. Techno’s little brother. A villain who wanted to latch onto the people he loved as tightly as possible and never let go. Asphodel wanted to watch the world burn hand in hand with his family. Asphodel wanted revenge.

“Is he really your son?” Dream challenged, laughing again. “Is he a murderer like you are, Thanatos? Because Lucid isn’t a murderer. He doesn’t like to hurt people because he’s a good person. And he’s good because I made him that way.”

“Asphodel cares about his family. We’re in this together because we protect each other,” Phil shot back. “I didn’t have to ‘make’ him that way. It’s how he’s always been.”

He’s good because I made him that way.

To Dream, Lucid was nothing more than a piece of playdough for him to mold to his will.

It’s how he’s always been.

To Phil, Asphodel was a son he understood. One who wanted to protect the family, and burn down the systems that tried to destroy it.

That same rage he had grown so familiar with burned inside his veins once more. Instead of fighting against it like he usually did, Tommy embraced it. Let the fire burn him from the inside out and focused it on what truly was angering him the most out of this entire situation.

“For the love of FUCK can you guys stop calling me those names?!?” Tommy shouted across the rooftop.

Both Dream and Phil froze at this, both glancing back to where Wilbur and Tommy were still huddled together.

“Lucid, be quiet-”

“Asphodel, stay out of this-”

“NO!”

Ripping his arm out of Wilbur's, Tommy stormed to the center of the roof, shoving Techno's arm away when he tried to hold him back, and placed himself right between Phil and Dream.

"I'm fucking sick of this!" Tommy yelled, glancing between both of them. "You're talking about me like I'm not even here! Trying to say who I am and what I want without actually asking me what the fuck that is!"

"Because I know you better than you know yourself, Lucid," Dream said, staring Tommy down. "You're acting out right now because you're overwhelmed. But I know you, and I know you're not a bad person. There's no way you'd ever be happy with a bunch of murderers, even if they have tricked you into thinking they're your family-"

"Don't you fucking try that," Tommy snapped, cutting Dream off. "Don't you DARE try to lie to me about my family again, you piece of shit! I have my memories back now. You can't fuck with me about that anymore."

"So you admit it then? You're on the side of the murderers?"

"For fuck's sake, you kidnapped me!" Tommy shouted, glaring at Dream. "You expect me to be on your side after you saw an amnesiac kid and your first thought was how you could lie and manipulate him to be on your side?"

The group of heroes standing behind Dream had stopped focusing on Sapnap and Karl's argument with Quackity, and instead were all fixated on Tommy.

"You *wanted* to be my sidekick, don't forget that," Dream hissed. "You act like I forced you into this, but you hated the Syndicate just as much as I did."

"Because you told me they killed my brother!"

"Yeah, because you told me you had a brother and I didn't know your relationship with the Syndicate, so I figured it wasn't unreasonable to assume that they might've killed him!"

A warm hand landed on his shoulder, and Tommy stumbled as Phil tugged him away from Dream. "Asphodel, I think-"

"I told you to stop fucking calling me that," Tommy snapped, smacking Phil's hand off of him. "I'm sorry, but I'm *not* Asphodel. I- I fucking wish I was, okay? I wish I was him so goddamn badly, but that's not the person I am anymore."

There was a beat of silence as Phil stared at him from behind his veil, hand still outstretched between them like he was frozen in place. Tommy watched as Phil took a deep breath, and slowly lowered his hand.

"That's okay," Phil whispered. "You never had to be the same. It doesn't matter to me. I said you'd always be my son, and I meant that."

Tommy felt someone else step behind him, and heard Techno's low voice mutter, "it doesn't matter to me either, and I'm sorry if we made you think it did."

Oh.

It didn't feel real, hearing Phil and Techno say what Tommy had wanted to hear from them for so long.

They loved him. Sincerity was dripping from both their voices, and when Tommy found himself leaning back against Techno's chest, Techno didn't stiffen. He just silently wrapped an arm over his chest, hugging him with the same kind of endearing awkwardness Tommy had come to expect from his older brother.

But Tommy wasn't able to be relieved yet. Not when Dream was still only a few feet in front of him.

"Fine. Seems like you've picked a side," Dream scoffed. He glanced behind him to the group of heroes still watching, and raised his sword in the air. "I think we're done talking, right guys?"

A tense silence hung in the air as the heroes stared at Dream, all of them unmoving.

A beat passed. And then another.

Then,

"Is what he said true?" Sapnap asked in a dangerously low voice, furrowing his brows. "Did you just kidnap a kid with amnesia and make him your sidekick?"

Dream stiffened, lowering the sword back to his side. "I knew he worked with the Syndicate, so when I found him knocked out in an alleyway, I did what I thought was best so he would be willing to give me their identities—"

"No!" Sapnap yelled, cutting Dream off. "No, you don't get to try and fucking justify that. It's a yes or no question. You found a kid with amnesia, knew he had connections to the Syndicate and instead of bringing him to the Committee so they could figure out what to do with him, you lied about his age and made him your sidekick. Yes or no?"

Despite the mask covering Dream's eyes, Tommy could practically feel the burning force of his glare.

"Yes, I did," Dream admitted, his voice tight with anger. "I did what I felt I had to do. Now, are you going to help me fight the four goddamn Syndicate members standing right in front of us or not?"

Another beat. Tommy couldn't breathe as he waited for the heroes to make up their minds.

Umbra was the one to speak first.

"No." She stepped away from the group, moving back towards the elevator. "You've gone too far, Dream. I'm not helping you hurt that kid any more than you already have."

Felis was the second to step back. "She's right. You fucked up."

To Tommy's surprise, Cordyceps then shook his head. "Yeah, I agree, Dream. That's really messed up."

Dream let out a strange choking noise. "Wh- George, what the fuck are you talking about? You- You agreed with me that this was the right thing to do!"

Sapnap's head whipped to Cordyceps (apparently named George). "You knew?!"

George shook his head. "No I didn't! I don't know what the hell he's talking about!"

At that moment, Tommy knew he could call George out if he wanted. He could say how George was one of the three interrogating him, calling out his lie for the other heroes to see.

But right now, George was stepping back like he didn't want to join the fight. If Tommy called him out, he might switch back to Dream's side, and things could get ugly. This was an out, and Tommy didn't see any downsides to letting him take it.

So he stayed silent. George joined Umbra and Felis in the open elevator, and the three turned to look at Karl and Sapnap.

"Hourglass, are you coming?" Umbra asked.

Karl hesitated, glancing between the elevator and Quackity. Then, after a few agonizing beats, he sighed and stepped into the elevator.

"Yeah, I have no reason to stay up here." Karl was pointedly looking away from Quackity now. "Sapnap, let's go."

"Go without me," Sapnap told him, keeping his gaze fixed on Dream. "Report what Dream did to the Committee. I'll keep an eye on him to make sure the kid can get away."

"Sapnap, c'mon, you can't be serious," Dream exclaimed. "You're not just gonna let the leaders of the Syndicate *and* the main crew of Las Nevadas go when they're right in front of us, are you?"

"Dionysus and I need to have a talk, which I'll make sure Hourglass comes back for," Sapnap said, shooting a glare Quackity's way before refocusing on Dream. "I don't give a shit about the others."

"I'll see you soon," Karl called out from the elevator.

And with that, the elevator slid shut, and the group disappeared. Now the only heroes on the roof were Dream and Sapnap.

Seemingly unsure of where else to go, Quackity gestured for Eret, Foolish, and Fundy to go down the stairs to leave the Tower. Although the three seemed reluctant to leave Quackity, they filed out with some quiet urging. Surprisingly, Dream didn't even seem to notice them leaving.

The stairwell door slamming shut behind them was deafening. Tension crackled through the air like a livewire. Dream's head whipped between the Syndicate and Sapnap, as if he wasn't sure which was a bigger threat.

"Give it up, Dream," Sapnap hissed, taking a step towards him. "You've done enough."

"You're a fucking coward!" Dream exclaimed, whirling around to face Sapnap completely. "This is our one chance to get a leg up on the Syndicate, and you're letting it go!"

"He's not an 'it', and he's not an opportunity," Sapnap shouted, smoke swirling around his arms. "The entire point of being a hero is that you're supposed to be better than the villains you fight!"

"I am a hero! I'm the only hero willing to do what actually needs to be done if we're ever going to get anywhere!"

"Really? You're a hero?" Sapnap let out a harsh laugh. "Because you look like the biggest villain out of anyone on this roof right now."

Dream's hands curled into fists at his sides. "I can't-"

"If you try to start a fight right now, you're going to lose," Sapnap then warned.

With trembling fists, Dream looked between Tommy and Sapnap, struggling to make a decision.

"Hellion," Phil suddenly cut in, making the hero startle. "May I have a hand at trying to convince him? I promise I won't kill him."

I won't kill him. But Phil didn't say he wouldn't hurt Dream.

Sapnap had to see the implications of Phil's words, but even still, he only hesitated for a moment before taking a step back.

"I'm outnumbered here, so," he muttered, keeping his head down.

Meanwhile, Dream stiffened as Phil walked towards him. "N- No! Don't fucking touch me, Thanatos!"

"Acheron," Phil called out, ignoring Dream's yells. "I think we need to remind this hero why you don't fuck with the Syndicate."

Techno dropped the arm he was holding Tommy with, and unsheathed his swords again as he walked towards Dream and Phil. The lack of warmth was sudden and sharp, but Wilbur quickly reappeared at his side, wrapping an arm around him and tugging him into his side.

"It's about time I was able to get revenge for what you did to my brother," Techno growled.

Shit. Shit shit shit. Tommy- he didn't want Dream to get the shit beat out of him. Not when he was already outnumbered. What the hell was the point in kicking a dog while he was

down?

Glancing up, Tommy saw Wilbur's jaw was clenched. He didn't like this either.

"Stop it!" Tommy shouted suddenly, making both men pause their advance. "He's- He's gonna get reported to the Committee anyway. Let them handle him!"

There was a beat as Phil and Techno both considered this, while Wilbur's grip on his shoulders tightened even more.

"We can't let this go," Techno finally said. "This isn't just about you anymore."

"This is about making an example out of him," Phil added, his wings stretched out behind him like some kind of dark angel. "No one else get involved. This is a family matter."

Then, they both turned back to Dream, and the fight was on.

Immediately, Dream split into several illusions of himself. Phil and Techno spun around, trying to land a hit on the illusions that turned to smoke as soon as they touched them. Wilbur yanked Tommy back as one ran towards him, and Tommy yelped as Wilbur was barely able to dodge a swipe of the possibly fake Dream's sword.

Wilbur and Tommy danced out of the way of the one Dream, while Phil and Techno clashed with all the others. "We're not involved in this!" Wilbur cried out, stumbling again as he barely dodged another possible hit.

"Yes you are!" Dream hissed, lunging forward again.

Without thinking, Tommy grabbed Wilbur's coat and shoved his brother behind him. Ignoring Wilbur's shout of protest, Tommy ducked under a well-aimed sword swipe, and kicked Dream square in the chest.

His foot connected to solid flesh, startling Tommy because he hadn't been sure if this Dream was an illusion or not. As Dream stumbled back, another illusion split off from himself. Tommy didn't pay attention to the illusion, instead focusing on trying to get a hit on the real one again.

He ducked under and away from different sword swipes. A few more times he tried to kick his leg out, but Dream jumped out of the way every single time.

His heart was racing and sweat was dripping down his back, but he knew how to fight Dream. The man had been his mentor for months. Tommy knew how he moved better than anyone else. And Tommy had come a long way since their last training session.

Nearly falling into a backbend to avoid another sword swipe, Tommy launched himself back up and aimed a fist straight at Dream's stupid mask. He grinned, preparing to hear the crack of porcelain against his knuckles.

Instead, his hand passed through smoke.

With his momentum having nowhere to go, Tommy stumbled forward and collapsed to his knees. The fake Dream he'd been fighting disappeared, and Tommy whipped his head around to try and figure out where the real Dream had gone.

"Lucid!"

Scrambling to his feet, Tommy whirled around and felt his breath catch in his throat when he saw the scene behind him.

Wilbur. Fuck. Tommy had forgotten about Wilbur.

Dream had one hand fisted in Wilbur's hair, yanking his head back while he held a knife to Wilbur's throat with the other. His form flickered a few times as he tried to turn intangible, but his eyes were wide and glazed over, meaning that Dream was using his fear illusion on him.

No. No no no. Not Wilbur. Dream couldn't be threatening Wilbur right now.

"Let him go!"

All the other illusions running around the roof disappeared into plumes of smoke. Phil and Techno stiffened when they realized the scene playing out in front of Tommy, with Techno lifting his swords again, but Phil holding a hand up to stop him.

"Dream! What the fuck are you doing?!" Sapnap shouted, having moved to the side of the roof next to Quackity.

"I'd be very careful what your next move is, Dream," Techno warned in a low growl.

"Isn't it obvious?!" Dream called out, manic laughter lining his words. "Lucid needs to make a goddamn choice here!"

Tommy's eyes widened. "What choice do you want me to make?"

Dream tightened the grip he had on Wilbur's hair, and pressed the knife harder against his throat. Wilbur barely reacted to the pain, instead having squeezed his eyes shut while muttering unintelligible things under his breath, clearly struggling to fight off the illusion of the train station.

"You should know what I want," Dream hissed, the predatory smile audible in his voice. "I want *you*. My sidekick. My loyal little brother."

"You're not my brother, you piece of shit!" Tommy snarled, flames licking the inside of his chest.

"Oh, but I could've been," he crooned. "There was a point in time where I loved you like you were my little brother, Lucid. Which just makes it that much sadder that now you're going to make me kill your other brother."

"If you do anything to him I swear to fucking god-"

"Me? I don't want to hurt him!" Dream exclaimed, shaking his head. "Well, I kind of do because he's Orpheus, but I don't want to *kill* your brother, Lucid. But if you don't choose to come back with me, then you're going to leave me no choice."

And there it was. The choice.

Of course. Tommy should've seen this coming. Dream wasn't going to let him walk away, even if he was completely outnumbered. He refused to be the loser, no matter what. And if that meant playing dirty and threatening Wilbur's life to get Tommy to go with him, then so be it.

"Don't do it, Dream!" Sapnap shouted.

"I hope you know the consequences that will be waiting for you if you harm Orpheus," Phil said, his voice low but practically booming across the roof.

Dream ignored the two of them, instead keeping the beady eyes of his mask on Tommy. "Make your choice, Lucid. Your freedom, or your brother?"

Fuck. Tommy knew there was only one thing he could do. Only one choice he could make here.

"D-Don't you dare fucking step over here," Wilbur suddenly gasped, stuttering as if he had to force the words out of himself.

"Wi- Orpheus, can you see me?" Tommy asked, his voice cracking when he almost said Wilbur's name.

Wilbur blinked several times, although his eyes were still completely glazed over. "No, I- I'm still there." His breathing hitched, and Tommy flinched when he squeezed his eyes shut again. "I'm trying not to look."

"You're not there," Tommy said, aching to reach out and grab Wilbur but knowing he couldn't make a single move towards him. "I promise you're not there again."

"I know," Wilbur whispered, although he sounded like he was struggling to believe it. "But don't- but don't you dare do what he tells you to."

"Wow, Orpheus being self-sacrificing?" Dream huffed, pressing the knife closer to Wilbur's throat. "Fucking shocker. Well, you heard him, Lucid. He doesn't want you to save his life! Are you gonna listen to him?"

The flames inside of Tommy swelled at that, because how *dare* Dream threaten his family. He could threaten Tommy, fine, whatever. Tommy could deal. But to threaten his family? To threaten *Wilbur*?

His hands began to heat up as the familiar rage stirred inside of him. Dream was a fucking monster. He was so tunnel-visioned to his mission that he wouldn't hesitate to slit Wilbur's throat if Tommy chose to walk away right now.

Tommy hated him. He hated Dream for taking his family away from him again and again. He hated Dream for lying to him. He hated Dream for knowing exactly what all of Tommy's weaknesses were, and how to best exploit them.

More than anything, he hated Dream because he won. He had won the second he put that knife to Wilbur's throat.

Clenching his fists at his sides, Tommy took a slow step towards Dream, and then another.

"You better not be walking towards Dream right now," Wilbur said, trying to sound upset, but looking like he was on the verge of tears now as he struggled in Dream's grip.

Tommy winced. "I'm sorry," he whispered, stopping when he was only a foot in front of Dream. "I can't let you go back to the train station."

"No!" Wilbur cried out, tears spilling from his unseeing eyes now.

"Lucid," Dream practically purred, keeping the knife on Wilbur's throat, but letting go of his hair and holding his hand out to him. "You're making the right choice."

Swallowing down the bile in his throat, Tommy forced himself to meet Dream's hand halfway.

"Fuck you, Dream."

Barking out a startled laugh, Dream wrapped his hand around Tommy's, and squeezed it tight. "It's good to have you back, Lucid."

Tommy didn't squeeze his hand back. Instead, he found himself focusing on Dream's hand itself. Calluses on his fingers, bruises mottling his knuckles, and familiar warmth pooling in the center of his palms.

The warmth was what Tommy would imagine liquid gold to feel like. So similar to the same warmth he'd felt from Punz before, but different at the same time. Punz's warmth had a sharp edge to it, something close to burning. Dream's was molten liquid—slow moving and dazzling to touch.

There was that familiar urge again. The urge to grab that warmth for himself. To pull it out of Dream by force, letting it buzz through his limbs and go straight to his head.

He wanted that warmth. He wanted to yank it from Dream and leave him a frozen husk. He wanted Dream to *pay*.

So he began to pull.

Warmth bled over from Dream's palms into Tommy's, invigorating his blood and sending his heart racing. Dream stiffened at the sensation, and although he didn't let go of either Wilbur or Tommy, it was obvious that he was startled.

"Wh- What are you?"

Dream cut himself off with a gasp as a rush of energy flowed through Tommy. It was like sparkling water was being injected straight into his veins, making bubbles pop inside of his chest and turning everything fuzzy.

It felt good. Too good. Dream made a pained sound and tried to pull his hand away, but Tommy tightened his grip around his fingers.

Tommy couldn't think straight. His thoughts were racing as the energy made his body hum with electricity. The fire in his chest was consuming him from the inside out. He hated Dream. He *hated* Dream. He hated Dream for hurting him. For hurting Wilbur.

White hot rage flowed through him as he pulled more of the warmth from Dream. It was dizzying to feel so much heat rushing over him, but he couldn't stop. If he stopped, Wilbur would die. If he stopped, Dream would ruin his life.

Dream screamed in pain and tried to yank his hand away again, but to no avail. Tommy could distantly hear Wilbur yelling for him, but it was so quiet underneath the blood rushing in his ears, the crackling energy racing through him. All he could think was how much he hated Dream. He hurt his family he hurt Wilbur he hated him *hate hate hate-Too much.*

Suddenly, the knife Dream was holding clattered to the ground as he fell to his knees. Then, in one final wave, the liquid warmth washed over his entire body like a dam breaking apart.

Tommy gasped, his head snapping up to stare at the stars.

Dream collapsed, falling face first onto the gravel.

And just like that, the warmth disappeared.

It was like when your ears pop on an airplane. The sound rushes back in all at once with stunning clarity compared to how muffled it all was before.

All of Tommy's senses returned to him in a split second. Suddenly, he could feel the cold wind biting against his flushed cheeks. He could hear the quiet shuffling of the others on the roof. He could see the stars above his head, twinkling in a way that looked far brighter than they usually did in the city.

Tommy took a sharp breath as Dream's limp hand fell out of his own. He felt... strange. The warmth was gone, but the energy was still there, crackling in Tommy's veins and making him feel all wiry.

His heart was racing and his breaths were coming in short gasps. He blinked, coming back to reality, and tilted his head down to look around the roof.

Phil, Techno, Quackity, and Sapnap were all frozen, watching him from several feet away. Even though Quackity was the only one unmasked, Tommy could sense that all of them had similar shocked expressions painted on their faces.

Wilbur, meanwhile, was bending down, pressing his fingers to Dream's exposed throat.

Checking for a pulse, Tommy realized with a wave of nausea rolling through him.

It was dead silent on the roof as Wilbur pressed his fingers against Dream's pulse point, lips pressed into a thin line. Seconds ticked by with agonizing slowness, and Tommy struggled to count his breaths.

Then, Wilbur glanced up at Tommy with his mouth twisted into something sorrowful, and gave a small shake of his head.

Dream was dead.

Dream was dead, and Tommy killed him.

Tommy was a murderer.

It took several seconds for the realization to settle in. For the weight of what he'd done to fall onto his shoulders and drag him to the ground. Tommy stared at Dream's lifeless body, feeling the energy humming in his blood and knowing that it was *Dream's* energy. His life force. Tommy had drained him of life entirely.

His knees turned to jelly as he collapsed onto the gravel, unable to tear his eyes from Dream.

"I killed him." His rough voice was unrecognizable to his own ears.

"Tommy?" Wilbur whispered, low enough for Sapnap not to hear his name. "Are you okay?"

No. No, he wasn't okay. Tommy *killed* someone. He was a murderer.

He tried to answer Wilbur, but his voice didn't seem to want to work. Instead, a strangled whine forced its way from his throat as his breathing picked up pace. He- He did that. He killed someone. He was a killer. He killed Dream. That was him.

Tommy couldn't breathe. No matter how many breaths he tried to take, it was like there was no air going into his lungs. He hiccuped as a sob tore its way through his chest with painful force, and heard himself make another strange keening sound as hot tears flowed down his cheeks.

"I- I killed- I killed- I murdered-"

No. He couldn't- he couldn't breathe. He couldn't think. All he could do was stare at Dream's dead body. All he could do was focus on the energy flowing through his veins that didn't belong to him.

"Tommy, it's okay." Wilbur was suddenly in front of him, blocking his view of Dream's body. "I need you to breathe for me."

Tommy couldn't. He couldn't process Wilbur's words. The only thing going through his head was *murderer murderer murderer*-

Wilbur wrapped his arms around Tommy, and Tommy immediately fell face first into his chest. A scream tore from his throat as he gripped his brother's shirt with violent desperation, trying to find anything to ground him, anything to focus on besides the fact that he had killed someone.

The arms holding him tugged him closer, Wilbur pulling him against his chest and guiding Tommy's face to his shoulder. Tommy couldn't breathe. He couldn't see through his tears as he sobbed into Wilbur's jacket.

"I'm so sorry," Wilbur whispered into his hair. "I'm so sorry this happened."

There was movement in the corner of Tommy's eye, and he was just able to make out Sapnap slowly making his way across the roof. He had his hands held up in surrender, but was walking so slowly, it was as if he was moving through molasses.

Wilbur stiffened when Sapnap kneeled down on the ground beside them, but the hero didn't seem to be focusing on them at all. Instead, his eyes fell on Dream, and Tommy watched a tear roll down his own cheek as he reached for Dream's mask.

Tommy was still violently sobbing as Sapnap took Dream's mask off. He wanted to look away. To not see the face of the man he murdered. But he knew he owed it to Dream to at least see his face once. To take in the face of the person whose life he quite literally stole.

Dream was young. That was Tommy's first thought seeing him. He was in his early twenties at the most, with freckles scattered across his face, and bright green eyes that were fixed on the stars, not seeing any of them.

The strange thing was that he didn't *look* dead. Sure, he was paler than he probably should've been, but that was about it. There were no visible wounds. He was pale, but that was it. If Tommy didn't know any better, he'd think that Dream was going to sit up any second and start yelling at him again.

Except it was difficult to try and imagine this young guy he was staring at as the same person who ruined his life. Who screamed that Tommy was *his*. Who threatened to kill Wilbur unless Tommy went with him.

Without the mask, Dream wasn't terrifying at all. He was just a person.

A person that Tommy killed.

"I'm sorry!" Tommy gasped out between his sobs, lifting his gaze from Dream's face to meet Sapnap's eyes. "I'm so- so fucking sorry I didn't- I didn't want to- he was-"

"It's okay," Phil cut in, appearing behind him and Wilbur with Techno at his side. "It was self-defense. You had no other choice."

But he did. Tommy could've stopped before he killed Dream. He could've let go, or yanked him away from Wilbur while he was distracted by what Tommy was doing to him.

Or Tommy could've been better. He could've fought Dream better—not fallen for his illusion that allowed him to grab Wilbur in the first place.

Or... Tommy wouldn't have had to fight Dream at all if Phil and Techno hadn't insisted on 'teaching him a lesson.' They were almost free. Dream was going to be forced to let them go, and they could've left this night behind them without any deaths.

But Phil and Techno both wanted to take things a step further. They couldn't leave well enough alone, and now Dream was dead.

"This is your fault!" Tommy yelled, looking up from Wilbur's shoulders to glare at his father and other brother through tear-filled eyes. "If- If you hadn't wanted to fucking- to get your revenge I wouldn't have- Dream wouldn't-"

Another sob tore through him as he struggled to say the words. The anger still humming inside of him combined with the buzzing of Dream's life energy was mixing with his cries, his emotions swirling around in his head so fast it was making him dizzy.

Techno, surprisingly, seemed to falter at this.

"We didn't think Dream would pull something like that."

"And that's your fucking problem!" Tommy shouted, his voice echoing across the rooftop. "You never think! You never stop to consider the consequences of what you do! It's all about what you both want, what you both think is right!"

Both Phil and Techno took a step back at his words, while Tommy slumped back against Wilbur, gasping for air as he fought to breathe through his tears.

"I'm so sorry, Tommy," Wilbur whispered, sounding like he was also on the verge of tears. "You didn't deserve this."

That only made Tommy cry harder, because while part of him wanted to believe that was true, he also couldn't stop the guilt already forming a black hole in his chest. He was a monster, just like Dream said he was. He was everything he said he didn't want to be.

"I... I think you guys should get him out of here," Quackity said quietly, having moved to stand next to Phil and Techno. "Before the others show up."

Phil nodded. "I think that would be a good idea." His wings shifted as he turned to look at Sapnap and Dream's corpse. "Hellion, this is kind of a callous thing to ask when you're mourning your friend, but-"

"I won't tell anyone the kid did it," Sapnap told him in a flat voice, keeping his eyes on Dream's face. "It wasn't really his fault anyway."

Despite his words, Sapnap was refusing to look at Tommy, and Tommy couldn't blame him.

"The Syndicate is indebted to you, Hellion," Phil said, kneeling down beside the hero. "There's one last thing I need to do though if I'm to ensure that my son is protected from

what happened tonight.”

Phil’s black, clawed hand reached out to touch the side of Dream’s face, but hesitated only an inch away from his skin.

“Hellion, this won’t change anything since he’s already passed, but if I use my ability on him, it’ll cover up the true cause of his death.”

Sapnap’s eyes were blank as he nodded in permission, shifting slightly away from Dream’s body. Wilbur tried to tuck Tommy’s head back into his shoulder so he didn’t see, but Tommy resisted, and Wilbur quickly dropped his hand.

The clawed fingers just barely grazed Dream’s freckled cheek, and Tommy watched as black veins sprouted up under his skin. They bulged unnaturally, racing through his entire body and causing black liquid to well up in his blank eyes.

It only took a few seconds, and then Phil was moving his hand away.

“Tell them I did it,” Phil instructed Sapnap.

Sapnap nodded again, tears still streaming down his face, but his eyes having glazed over as he stared at nothing.

With that, Phil rose to his feet, and gestured for Wilbur and Tommy to get up as well. Tommy didn’t even try to stand, Wilbur instead threading his arm under Tommy’s legs and lifting him into his arms. Tommy clung to his brother, burying his face in his sweater as he continued to cry, physically unable to stop at this point.

“Let’s go home,” Phil said softly.

There was no sense of relief in his voice, and Tommy understood.

He didn’t want to go home, but he didn’t want to stay here.

He just wanted to stop existing. To not have to think about the reality of what he’d done.

But he couldn’t do that. So instead, he curled closer to the only person he could, and whimpered when Wilbur ran his fingers through his hair.

And just like that, they went home.

Chapter End Notes

andddd dream is dead.

the next chapter is going to be more of an epilogue, so this is kind of the end of the 'main plot'. the journey has been insane, and I hope you guys have enjoyed the arc

Tommy has gone through in this story. poor kid has had it rough

please please please let me know what you thought down in the comments below, I read all of them and they really make my day!

and don't be sad that this fic is almost over! I have a NEW multi chapter fic already started that's going to pick up regular updates after I publish the last chapter of this. it's crimeboys centric, has a ton of super cool worldbuilding, and I have SO many complicated dynamics and relationships planned so please make sure to go check it out [here!](#)

don't forget I have a banger playlist for this fic which you can check out [here](#)

anyway I have a discord server! if you wanna talk about new chapters with a bunch of other people who like the fic, or just want to get updates on my writing in general, check it out here <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

(also sorry this chapter didn't have the full syndicate pop up, I was dealing with 14 characters on the roof at one point and i wouldn't have been able to handle adding anymore rip)

I really really hope you guys enjoyed, this fic has meant a ton to me and I'm really proud of the direction its gone

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

each pray'r accepted, each wish resign'd

Chapter Summary

A shattered family picture.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone it's finally here. the end of this fic. holy shit.

there's a lot I wanna say about this fic but I'll leave that for the end notes. for right now, I'll just say thank you so much for all the love on the last chapter, I'm really glad you guys seemed to appreciate what I had in mind for this

now, without further ado, on with the epilogue

TWs: mentions of dissociation, panic attacks, injuries

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Six months later.

Tommy woke up screaming.

He could still feel it. Feel the energy rushing through him. The buzzing in his veins, his head- *everything*. It was so much. His anger and the life force twisting together to create a rapid-fire dance in his mind that he couldn't stop.

Dream's life energy flowing through his limbs. The warmth he sucked from his palms until he left him a husk. It was too much. The heat in his chest was unbearable, the flames were consuming him and he couldn't breathe couldn't breathe-

“Tommy, Tommy it's okay.”

Warm hands were on his face in the darkness, thumbs wiping away his tears as a blurred face appeared in front of him.

“I- I could feel it- I was there again- I can feel the energy-“

“You're not there anymore,” Wilbur whispered, his dark eyes barely visible in the shadows of the room. “Breathe with me, Tommy. Just breathe.”

Wilbur took an exaggerated breath, and Tommy did his best to mimic it, although it was stuttered. Wilbur didn't say anything about the poor attempt and just repeated the motion. Tommy did the same.

They kept at it. Wilbur's hands dropped from Tommy's face to grab his hands, and he squeezed his fingers in time with the rhythm of his breathing. Tommy gasped along, the panic flowing through him ebbing away little by little with each passing second.

He wasn't on the roof. He wasn't on the roof. He wasn't on the roof.

The iron band lifted from his chest, and Tommy sucked in a greedy gulp of air as his tears finally stopped flowing. All at once, Tommy tipped forward to rest his forehead on the blankets of his bed, and Wilbur moved his hands to gently rub circles into Tommy's back.

"You back with me?"

Tommy nodded. "Yeah. I'm back."

His ragged breathing filled the silence in the room, expanding and contracting above his head like a swollen thundercloud.

After several more minutes, the burning in his lungs faded away. His eyes were sticky with tears and sleep, and the remnants of the dream clung to his skin like a thick blanket. Taking one more deep breath, he forced himself to sit up.

The door to his room was closed, moonlight from the hall spilling onto the carpet from the crack between the door and the floor. Wilbur probably heard his scream and phased through the walls to get to him. It was faster that way after all.

"Same nightmare?" Wilbur asked after a moment.

"What else would it be?" Tommy huffed, dropping his eyes to his lap.

In the faint light of his room, Tommy could just barely make out his pale hands twisted into the blanket laying over his legs.

Tommy dreamt about the roof nearly every night. It was burned into the backs of his eyes, something that replayed in his mind like the world's worst movie. Dream's face flashed through his memories again, and he shoved down the familiar spike of nausea that always accompanied seeing that.

"You ready to go back to sleep?" Wilbur then asked, the darkness hushing his words.

"Yeah, I think so," Tommy mumbled, his eyes already growing heavy.

He pushed down his blankets, scooting to the side to make room for his brother. Wilbur didn't question it, instead just crawling up and fitting himself next to Tommy. This was their routine now. Whenever one of them had a nightmare, there was no question that the other would stay the night with them. Two nights ago, Tommy had crawled into Wilbur's bed when he woke up seeing the train station flash in his mind and hugged him tight enough so that he

stopped flickering between being solid and not. A few days before that, Tommy had woken up sobbing, and it had taken Wilbur nearly an hour to get him to calm down.

They had the routines memorized. As Tommy settled back down on his pillow, he curled close to his brother until his forehead was resting against his chest, and focused on the too slow heartbeat thudding through his skull as exhaustion washed over him once again.

“Night Wil,” he whispered, his voice hoarse from his screams.

“Goodnight, Tommy,” Wilbur whispered back.

It didn’t take long for sleep to pull him under again after that. And this time, he was lucky enough not to have any dreams.

The next morning, Tommy blinked open his eyes to an empty bed. Sunlight streamed through the cracks in his blinds, and his head was pounding with the remnants of his disturbance from the night before.

Seeing the empty blankets next to him, a spike of fear stabbed through his chest. His breathing hitched, and he had to take a minute to focus on the sound of clattering coming from the kitchen to reassure himself that Wilbur was there. He was fine. Tommy wasn’t alone.

Once the pain in his chest passed, he forced himself to get up.

Sleep weighed on his limbs like something thick and sticky as he clambered out of bed and shuffled to the bathroom. His eyes were red-rimmed, dark circles casting long shadows over his face. Not that much worse than how he usually looked.

Stumbling out of his room, it only took him a few seconds to get to the kitchen. That was one of the things Tommy found himself liking about his apartment with Wilbur—it was small, and didn’t take long to get from one side to the other. If he ever needed anything, Wilbur was only a few steps away.

The smell of eggs hung heavily in the air as Tommy took in the state of the kitchen. Wilbur was standing at the stove, a spatula in one hand and holding the handle of the frying pan in the other. Next to the stovetop, Tommy spotted a quart of milk and a carton of eggs, but quickly looked past them as his eyes darted to the coffee maker.

“Are we out of coffee?” Tommy asked when he noticed there was no pot brewing like there normally was when Tommy woke up. He walked over to the cabinet, tugging it open and finding that they had plenty of coffee, and grabbed the jar while also taking a filter to set it up.

Wilbur didn’t say anything in response, and Tommy frowned as he put the filter in the machine and dumped the grounds on top. Once he set the pot to brew, he turned to face the stove again, and jolted when he saw smoke rising from the frying pan.

“Shit! The eggs!”

Running over, Tommy shoved Wilbur out of the way, taking the burnt eggs off the stovetop and waving his hands in the air to get rid of the smoke. Wilbur still didn't say anything as Tommy turned the fan on over the stovetop, breathing a sigh of relief as the smoke was quickly sucked up and out of the air.

"Are you trying to set off the fucking fire alarm?" Tommy asked, whirling around to face his brother. "How the hell do you even burn eggs?"

Tommy cut himself off when he saw Wilbur's eyes were completely glazed over. He was staring at nothing, his face slack and arms hanging limp at his sides. He still had the spatula in one hand, and Wilbur didn't make any move to hold onto it as Tommy tugged it from his fingers.

"Shit," Tommy muttered.

Turning off the burner, Tommy grabbed Wilbur's hand, squeezing it in the hopes of eliciting some kind of response. There was nothing. No flash of recognition in his eyes. No hint that he was even aware Tommy was there.

"Alright then," he said to himself.

Tightening his grip on Wilbur's hand, Tommy dragged him out of the kitchen and towards the couch. Wilbur didn't fight, just following on stiff legs and letting Tommy guide him like he was little more than a puppet.

This was another part of the routine Tommy had grown used to. In the past, Wilbur only used to dissociate when he possessed someone for too long. Since the events of That Night though, sometimes he would flash back to the train station and could dissociate just doing the most mundane of tasks. Like making eggs.

Sitting down on the couch across from Wilbur, Tommy spread his hand out, and lightly began to pinch different parts of his palm.

"Can you feel that, Wil?" He asked softly, going through the familiar motions. "Just focus on the pinching."

It was a slow process, dragging Wilbur out from the depths of his own mind. One time, he'd likened it to a thick fog that he got lost in. His thoughts would cloud until the fog was so thick, he couldn't see anything in front of him. Sometimes he went to the train station, other times he was just... somewhere else.

A lot of the time, it only took a few minutes for Tommy's grounding methods to get through to Wilbur. Sometimes there was nothing Tommy could do, and Wilbur would be gone for an entire day. On the worst days, Wilbur would flicker between being tangible and not, and if he couldn't focus enough to keep himself corporeal, the only thing Tommy could do to help him was just talk to him and hope he was listening.

Today wasn't a terrible day, but it wasn't a good day either. It took nearly thirty minutes for Wilbur to start responding to anything Tommy did, but Tommy was nothing if not patient

when it came to his brother. He just kept pinching his hands, talking to him about anything that came to mind, and soon enough a sense of awareness crept back into Wilbur's eyes.

He blinked once. Then, his fingers began to curl. Soon, he was nodding along to whatever Tommy was saying.

The familiar process. Another routine.

"How here are you now?" Tommy asked once Wilbur had actually made eye contact with him.

Wilbur furrowed his brows. "Sixty- no, seventy percent."

"You can say sixty. That's okay."

His frown deepened, but Wilbur nodded anyway. "Sixty."

And because it was only sixty, Tommy decided to hold off on finishing breakfast for a bit longer. Instead, he just continued doing what he'd been doing, this time encouraging Wilbur to pinch *his* hand to help him get anchored back in his body again.

Another fifteen minutes passed. When Tommy asked for another percentage, Wilbur said ninety, and Tommy was relieved.

"You burnt the eggs," Tommy told Wilbur once they'd both gone back to the kitchen. He was cleaning up the remnants of the attempt at breakfast, while Wilbur was pouring himself a cup of coffee from the pot that had long since gone cold.

"Shit, sorry," Wilbur said, wincing when he took a sip of the tepid coffee. "I dunno what triggered it this time. One second I was making eggs, the next I was just... gone."

Tommy shrugged, rinsing out the pan before putting it back on the stovetop. "Don't do the apologizing shit. It's not your fault."

"I nearly set a fire in our kitchen," Wilbur argued.

"And I woke you up screaming last night. I don't need to apologize for that, do I?" Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

Wilbur glared at him, but after a few beats, he sighed. "Fair enough."

Turning the burner on again, Tommy cracked a few more eggs into the pan, handing the carton to Wilbur to put back in the fridge along with the milk. This time, Wilbur hung to the side while Tommy made the food, and it was only a few minutes before they were both piling fluffy, yellow eggs onto two plates.

The eggs were rubbery, and the coffee was cold, but it wasn't a terrible breakfast. The caffeine still jolted Tommy into sharp awareness, and by the time he was rinsing his plate off in the sink, he was buzzing with energy to get ready for the day.

Sometimes, Tommy wondered how these mornings would go if they still lived with Phil and Techno. Would Techno comfort Tommy when he woke up screaming? Would Phil help Tommy ground Wilbur?

Tommy wanted to imagine they would. But he had learned not to give his father and other brother too much credit, so he dismissed the thought before he could linger on it for too long. All that would do was distract him.

It had been over five months since he and Wilbur had moved out. About a week after the night on the roof, Tommy had felt like he was going insane staying in that house with Phil and Techno. Things were horribly tense between the four of them. Every time Tommy saw them, all he saw was a mirror. A vision of what he could become. Of who he would've been if he'd never lost his memories.

Tommy was terrified of that. He didn't want more blood on his hands, but he couldn't help but think that if he stayed with Phil and Techno for much longer, he would end up following in their footsteps anyway. He'd already killed one person, who's to say he wouldn't end up killing more?

Tommy didn't like that part of himself. The part that *wanted* to hurt Dream. The burning anger that lived inside of him, just waiting for the next chance to be fed. There was never any way he was going to be able to stomp it out entirely, but Phil's encouraging smiles and Techno's warm grunts of approval were tinder for the flames. Tommy still wanted them to be proud of him. Still ached for their love and affection.

He knew they would offer that same love freely, without expecting him to be like them in return. But a part of Tommy wanted to be like them. Still wanted to mirror the two of them in all the worst, twisted ways. It was a dark desire that he held deep inside of him—one he didn't want to put a voice to.

The only way to keep himself from giving into that desire was to leave.

So one night after waking up with tears on his face and his voice hoarse from screaming, Tommy curled into his brother's side and whispered a soft, "*I think we should move out.*"

Wilbur had agreed.

Telling Phil and Techno their decision wasn't easy. In fact, it was one of the hardest things Tommy had done. But if Tommy stayed, he would lose himself sooner or later. Wilbur had already lost so much of himself by participating in the Syndicate, and Tommy was determined to drag him fully back into the land of the living instead of being a walking ghost.

Tommy and Wilbur switched off explaining their reasoning during that conversation. Techno had kept his eyes on the table the entire time, refusing to look up. Phil had cried, but didn't fight them on it. Both of them understood, even if it hurt.

Despite the insistence that they would be fine on their own, Phil wouldn't let them leave without making sure they would be taken care of financially. Tommy didn't want either of

them to know where they lived, so Phil had just given them a lump sum of money that would last them for years. He said if they ever needed more, they could call him.

Leaving hurt so much more than Tommy expected it to. It was like a hole had been ripped open in his chest, but it was either that or lose himself to the swirling emotions of a person he didn't want to be. And with time, the hole in his chest had healed over. It scabbed, and sometimes it would break open and the hurt would feel fresh all over again, but it was getting better.

Wilbur felt the same hurt he did. Possibly even more. But whenever Tommy asked him if he regretted moving out with him, Wilbur sounded so horrified at the concept of being separated that Tommy would end up changing the subject to keep them both from tearing up.

Things were... better. Not great. Tommy didn't know if things could ever be great again. But they were better.

Since Tommy couldn't talk to a therapist about anything that happened, he instead took to googling a lot of what was going on with both his and Wilbur's mental health. According to the internet, he and Wilbur both experienced severe separation anxiety whenever they weren't with each other. Probably because of the whole kidnapping bit, followed by the amnesia and the trauma that came with it. It was something they were both working on, although it was a slow going process.

They had jobs. Not necessarily because they needed the money, but it was better for them both to have things to do during the day, and again, they needed the time away from each other. Tommy hated not knowing where Wilbur was or what he was doing, feeling like there was a constant itch under his skin whenever he was separated from his brother for longer than a few minutes. His mind would always jump to worst case scenarios like what if Wilbur got hurt? What if he was caught up in an accident? What if he *died*?

But work helped with that, because Tommy had things to focus on other than the fact that his brother could be dead in a ditch somewhere. He worked at a smoothie shop, and while he hated customer service, it was a simple enough gig that mostly just involved chucking fruit in a blender. Not great, but not terrible either.

"What time does your shift start?" Wilbur asked when he was more than halfway finished with his eggs.

"Three," Tommy told him, taking a sip of cold coffee. "Yours?"

Wilbur hummed. "Three-thirty."

It was almost two in the afternoon. After finishing their breakfast, Wilbur called the shower first, which Tommy grumbled about and earned an elbow to the gut for. Before Tommy could smack Wilbur back, he had already phased through the door to the bathroom, and Tommy muttered curses under his breath as he went to his room to wait.

Once Wilbur was done showering, it was Tommy's turn in the bathroom. He ended up sitting on the floor of the shower under the burning water for several minutes, remembering the

feeling of hot energy racing through his veins, before he came to his senses and twisted the temperature to ice cold. The shock was horrible for his nerves, but snapped him out of it immediately.

At two forty-five, Tommy and Wilbur left the apartment together. They hurried down the busy city streets, weaving between the crowds of people as the public library came into view. It wasn't a coincidence that Tommy had a job in a smoothie shop that sat right across from the library where Wilbur worked. It also wasn't a coincidence that their shifts began and ended at nearly the same times.

Again, the separation anxiety thing was a work in progress.

When they reached the front of the smoothie shop, Tommy gave Wilbur a quick hug, not letting himself linger as he shoved down the bubbling anxiety in his chest. It was fine. Wilbur would be right across the street, and nothing was going to happen to either of them.

Still, his skin itched and there was a nervous buzzing in the back of his mind throughout his entire shift. Wilbur was fine, he was fine, they were both fine. Tommy knew that. He just had to keep reminding his anxiety of that too.

Work was the same dredgery it always was. Rinsing out blenders, chopping up fruit, moving in tune with the other workers as they all passed different ingredients to one another as the same ten pop songs cycled through the speakers over their heads—it was mind-numbing, but it kept him busy. When the afternoon rush hit, Tommy was so busy, he didn't worry about his brother for over an hour, which might've been a new record for him.

As the afternoon stretched into the evening, and the sky was tinged orange with the setting sun, someone switched the TV on in the shop from whatever bullshit reality show was playing to the news.

"And in other news tonight, as of this Friday it will have been exactly six months since the former Number One Hero Dream was killed by Syndicate leader Thanatos. Mayor Schlatt is expected to give a public statement about the anniversary, and some supporters of his hope to hear that he will be introducing new reforms to the Hero Committee. When asked for a comment on the anniversary, current Number One Hero Hellion declined to say anything."

Tommy stiffened at the words, nails digging into the orange he was holding until juice began to spill out over his palms. The report went on to talk about some more bullshit that Mayor Schlatt might do for the anniversary, and then discussed rumors that the Hero Recruitment Program will be expanded in the wake of public support.

The city was heartbroken by the death of Dream. The public demand for more heroes rose higher than it had ever been before, and the Committee announced they were going to be taking applications for the Recruitment Program for the first time in years.

The Syndicate continued operating like it always had. The absence of Orpheus following Dream's death was certainly noticed, and while nothing was confirmed, the common public consensus was that Dream had somehow killed Orpheus, and Thanatos killed him in revenge.

Hellion never said a single thing about Tommy or his involvement in Dream's death. Asphodel's title was never made public. The only comment the Committee ever made was that Lucid was permanently retired, and Tommy had no idea what Sapnap had told them about him and his involvement with Dream. Whether they knew or not, the truth of Lucid never made it to the public eye.

Dream died with his Hero reputation still intact, and Tommy wasn't sure if that upset him or not. A part of him was furious that no one ever came clean about what Dream did to him. That the public still thought of him as this perfect, righteous hero who was one of the most upstanding citizens in the entire city.

But another part of Tommy just... didn't care. Dream was dead. It wasn't like he could face any punishment for what he'd done to Tommy, since he'd already paid the ultimate price. What was the point in ruining a dead man's reputation? Even if he'd done terrible things to Tommy, he'd still protected the city countless times. The memorials in his honor weren't *wrong* necessarily. And it wasn't like Dream could see them either way.

Whatever he thought about Dream's reputation though didn't matter though, because more than anything Tommy just didn't like thinking about Dream at all. He didn't like remembering the sensation of Dream's life energy flowing through his veins faster than his own blood. He didn't like seeing those vacant green eyes stare up at the stars with no light behind them. He didn't like remembering how it felt to realize that Dream wasn't a monster or an idol but just a person. A person that he killed.

He couldn't escape it though. So he crushed the rest of the orange into a mess of pulp and juice, before tossing it into the trash and grabbing another one.

Soon, the TV was switched back to the mindless reality show it had been on before, and Tommy was able to breathe a sigh of relief. The rest of the shift went on without issue, the light outside growing dimmer and dimmer as the sun fully disappeared from the sky.

When Tommy got off his shift, he waved goodbye to his coworkers before practically sprinting across the street. He ran into the library and it only took him a few minutes to spot his brother behind the front desk.

"Oh shit, is it nine already?" Wilbur asked when he spotted Tommy.

Tommy, trying to hide the way his shoulders slumped seeing that Wilbur was fine, nodded and rested his elbows on the counter. "Sure is. Losing your sense of time already, old man?"

Wilbur huffed. "Fuck off. I've been down in the archives for the past four hours and I swear to god time isn't real down there."

"Sounds boring," Tommy snorted.

"You just say that because you're a child who has no appreciation for history," Wilbur said, rolling his eyes.

"You can't call me a child anymore! I'm eighteen now. An *ah-dult*, y'know?"

“Eighteen or not, you’re still a gremlin child.”

Tommy scowled. “You’re a bitchy old man. I should start saying you’re my grandpa and try to get you the senior discount at fuckin’ IHOP.”

“If you do that then I’m gonna tell them you’re eleven to get you the kid’s discount,” Wilbur retorted, smirking at him.

Despite the fake scowl on his face, Tommy couldn’t help but chuckle at that. “Can I spray paint your hair silver?”

“Only if I get to wear a fake mustache,” Wilbur agreed, his smile softening.

As Tommy giggled at the mental image of Wilbur with grey hair and a fake mustache, he couldn’t help but think back to a few weeks earlier, when they had celebrated Tommy’s eighteenth birthday together. The two had debated calling Phil and Techno for it, but in the end, Tommy had too much anxiety churning around his gut to think it was a good idea. So instead Wilbur let Tommy order whatever takeout he wanted, and the two stuffed themselves full of overpriced burgers while watching Disney movies on the living room couch together until they both passed out into food comas.

It had been a good birthday. That’s what Tommy told himself, even though there were two very obvious holes in his chest that didn’t go away for the entire day.

Tommy only had to wait around for about twenty more minutes before it was time for Wilbur to clock out. He stayed in the front while Wilbur went to the staff room to grab his things, and within a few minutes, the two were wrapped in the cool night air and hurrying back to their apartment.

“What do you want for dinner when we get home?” Wilbur asked, nudging Tommy’s side with his elbow as they walked.

“I dunno. Spaghetti?”

Wilbur huffed. “We had spaghetti two nights ago.”

Tommy shrugged. “It’s easy to cook though, innit?”

A beat passed as Wilbur considered this. “Hm, that’s true. I guess I wouldn’t mind spaghetti again.”

Quiet fell between them once more with the issue of dinner settled. A chilly breeze blew through the winding streets, bringing with it the distant scent of delicious food and cigarette smoke. There weren’t a ton of people out at this time of night, but Wilbur still pressed himself up against Tommy’s side whenever they passed by a suspicious looking person, shooting them a death glare in silent warning.

Of course, their walk couldn’t be too peaceful. Because when they were only a block away from their building, there was a distant *boom!* followed by a plume of smoke rising from behind the buildings a few streets down.

“Fucking hell!” Wilbur cursed.

Meanwhile, Tommy had already whipped out his phone, and saw a news alert blaring across the screen.

Syndicate spotted near the L'Manberg Courthouse. Heroes have been dispatched, civilians advised to stay clear of the area.

“Shit,” Tommy muttered, showing the phone to Wilbur.

Wilbur frowned. “Goddammit. Seriously? Tonight?”

The two of them shared a knowing look. Even though they were both exhausted from work, that had definitely been an explosion that had gone off, and they couldn’t ignore that.

“Let’s hurry up and get our shit,” Tommy said, grabbing Wilbur’s wrist before sprinting down the street.

They ran down the road as fast as they could, hurrying back to their apartment and ignoring the strange stares shot their way. Running inside the building, they practically threw themselves in the elevator, and as the car slowly moved up Tommy couldn’t stop himself from bouncing on his toes with nervous energy.

Once inside their apartment, Tommy chucked his backpack onto the couch, while Wilbur ran straight for his room. Dread curled inside of Tommy as he dug under his bed for his mask. His mind was racing as different thoughts tripped over one another like there was a stampede inside his skull. How big was the explosion? Were there a lot of civilians still around or had the courthouse been closed for the night? Which Syndicate members were there? And which heroes had been sent to deal with them?

Tommy wouldn’t know the answers to any of these until they got over to the courthouse themselves. Right as he pulled his hoodie over his head, Wilbur appeared in his doorway, owl mask already covering up his entire face.

“You ready?” Wilbur asked.

Nodding, Tommy pulled his own matching owl mask over his head. “Yup. Let’s go.”

Locking their apartment door behind them, they took the elevator all the way to the parking garage. The motorcycle Tommy had had to beg Wilbur to let him get was in the same parking spot it always was, covered by a dusty blue tarp. After yanking the tarp off, Tommy tossed Wilbur a second helmet, before putting on his own.

Tommy climbed on the bike first, settling himself at the handles and taking a breath to steady himself. Wilbur sat down behind him, securing himself by wrapping his arms around Tommy’s waist and giving him a thumbs up when he was good to go.

Then, they were off.

If Tommy wasn't wearing the mask, the icy wind would've been biting at his cheeks in a near painful way. But his face was covered, his hair was shoved down by the helmet on his head, and the only thing he could feel was the warmth from Wilbur behind him. He sped down the streets of L'Manberg, weaving the bike between traffic as the smoke plume in the distance grew larger and larger.

Despite the situation, despite the dread making a home for itself in the back of his throat and between his ribs, despite the fear racing through him and making his heart scream in his ears, he couldn't help but be exhilarated by the bike. Wilbur had thrown a bit of a fit when Tommy declared his intentions to get a motorcycle, because it was fucking *cool* and it's not like Wilbur could drive, so they needed a way to get around. It had taken quite a bit of convincing, but Tommy had gotten through to him, and the motorcycle became his favorite way to get around the city.

It was unbelievably fast. Darting between cars like a blur of color, Tommy could feel the stares on both him and Wilbur as they sped between the dark shadows and the bright beams of orange light from the street lamps above their heads. Wind ruffled his hoodie and the bike rumbled underneath him like it was alive. It growled as Tommy sped up, his heartbeat growing louder in his ears the closer they got.

When they were only a block away from the courthouse, Tommy took a sharp right into an alleyway. He parked the bike behind a dumpster to hide it, setting his and Wilbur's helmets on top of the seat and securing them with bungee cords, before the two ran out onto the main street.

There were a few civilians that paid Tommy and Wilbur no mind as they sprinted away from the courthouse. But they were the only two moving towards the place. The closer they got, Tommy noticed the smell of smoke hanging heavily in the air, and wrinkled up his nose as they turned the corner to see the damage completely.

It seemed that an explosive had been set up near the front of the courthouse, damaging the entrance and making a gaping hole where the front doors should be. Thick, dark smoke billowed out from the windows, but from what Tommy could tell, the building itself wasn't actively on fire.

Okay. Not as bad as it could've been. That was the first concern out of the way.

Now onto the bigger concern. Was there anyone hurt, and if so, where were they?

"I'll do a quick run through inside to see if anyone's trapped in there," Wilbur told him, the orange street lights passing through his transparent body. "You stay out here and look for any injured people who escaped, got it?"

Tommy ignored the way that made his heart skip a beat as anxiety shot through him, and nodded anyway. "Sounds good."

Wilbur could take care of himself. Especially when he was intangible. Nothing could physically interact with him when he was like that, so he would be safer than anyone else. He would be fine. Tommy knew that.

There was a bit of reluctance in Wilbur's eyes as he gave Tommy one more quick nod. But then he turned completely invisible, and Tommy spun around to survey the entire front of the courthouse, shoving down the itching fear under his skin. He was still a good distance away from it, so it took him a moment to identify the four figures fighting on top of the marble steps that led up to the still-smoking entryway.

It was Tubbo and Ranboo. They were both donning their full Styx and Lethe attire, with Ranboo hopping into the void and hopping out a few feet away every few seconds, while Tubbo had his hands held in front of him to keep his force fields in place. It seemed that Hellion was focusing on Ranboo, disappearing into plumes of smoke only to reappear right as Ranboo emerged from a void portal. Meanwhile, Tubbo was going against Umbra, holding his force fields up as she jumped between shadows, running at him over and over again with small knives in both of her hands.

There was a certain measure of relief that made itself known behind Tommy's rib cage at the realization that Phil and Techno weren't there. While it wasn't great that he might be spotted by Tubbo and Ranboo, at least he wasn't going to have to pretend to be someone else in front of his own father and brother.

That was still probably the oddest thing about this whole arrangement. That no one but he and Wilbur knew who they were.

When they had first moved out, Tommy had been content to pick up a civilian life. To leave behind all the villain hero stuff permanently, and just try to heal the fractured pieces of his mind. Wilbur had felt the same.

Until two months ago. A hero villain fight had picked up only a block away from their apartment complex, and somehow, Hellion had accidentally sparked a fire. It had consumed the building, but the heroes were too distracted by the Syndicate to get civilians out.

Wilbur was washing the dishes, handing them one by one to Tommy to dry. Leaning against the counter, Tommy ran a rag over a bowl as he listened to the news list out the number of civilians injured.

"I feel like we could be doing more," Tommy said, wincing when the newscaster's tinny voice gave another update on the situation. The smoke from the fire had traveled down the block and was blowing through their window, making both him and Wilbur cough.

Wilbur's hands trembled as he handed Tommy another glass. "I... I think we could be too. I'm fucking sick of hearing about all these people getting hurt when they don't need to be and just-" he paused. "I get what you mean."

There was a moment of silence as Tommy dried off the glass, water droplets running over his palms.

"Do you want to do something about it?" Tommy then asked, setting the glass in the cabinet.

Turning off the water, Wilbur dragged wet hands through his hair. He stared out the window for a moment, his dark eyes unreadable as he twisted his lips into a frown.

"I do."

And that was that.

They worked out exactly how they wanted to do this. Neither one of them wanted to get involved with the hero villain fights. They'd both had plenty of that to last them a lifetime. Not to mention, neither one was particularly keen about the idea of the other possibly getting hurt in a fight. They had strict ground rules about staying out of trouble and making it clear they were a neutral party.

Wilbur had the idea to wear identical masks. They weren't trying to put on personas or anything of the sort. They both just wanted to help civilians. Nothing more.

Matching owl masks. Plain clothes like jeans and hoodies. They didn't even give themselves names. Although the news had yet to report on them, word on the street spread fast, with the public having dubbed them 'The Owls.'

He didn't care what they were called. He just wanted to help people. And so far, it seemed like it was working, because the heroes had never bothered them, and the villains had always been too busy to pay them any attention. Tommy was fine with that. The less attention on them, the better.

Tommy was quickly pulled out of his thoughts by a pained cry coming from the bottom steps of the courthouse. A woman in a soot-covered pantsuit had fallen to the ground, cradling her right arm to her chest and wincing whenever she jostled it.

Ignoring the fight happening at the top of the steps, Tommy instead beelined for the woman. She flinched when he came close, and he held his hands up as he slowed his pace, keeping his body language as open as possible to show he wasn't a threat.

"I'm here to help you," he told her, his voice crackly under the voice changer.

The woman was breathing harshly, scrambling back against the steps but unable to get to her feet as Tommy stepped closer. "Wh- Who are you? You're not a hero."

"I'm not with the Syndicate either," Tommy reassured her, crouching down in front of her. "I'm just someone who wants to help."

"A vigilante?" The woman asked, narrowing her eyes.

Tommy nodded. Although he wouldn't exactly say he and Wilbur were vigilantes by definition, they weren't heroes and they weren't villains, so he supposed it was the closest middle ground term he could find. "Pretty much. I can help you with your arm and get you out of here."

Her dark eyes narrowed further. "Wait, I-" she winced when her arm moved again, "-I've heard of you, I think. The Owls, right?"

"Yup, that's us. The other owl is off searching for people trapped in the courthouse," Tommy explained, keeping his hands up but still shifting closer to her. "We're not here to get

involved with the hero villain shit. We just wanna help civilians.”

The wariness in her eyes began to fade as she straightened up. “You’ll help me with my arm?”

Tommy nodded, holding out his hands. “I can heal it for you.”

She stared into the dark eyes of his owl mask a few moments longer, before letting out a shaky breath and scooting towards him. She whimpered at the movement, but forced herself to get close enough so Tommy could touch her arm.

“I’ll make it fast,” Tommy reassured her. She gave him a nod of permission.

As gently as he could, he rested his hands on the burnt skin of her arm. She let out a screech of pain, but it died out almost as soon as he began to heal her. Burning pain lanced through his own arms, and he grit his teeth as he tried to keep any whimpers from spilling out of his own lips. He could feel his own skin bubbling, flames racing up and down his limbs as he took the pain away from her and for himself.

His jaw ached from how tightly he was clenching it. But soon enough, the burning faded, and Tommy practically collapsed to the ground as the woman slumped against the stairs.

“Holy shit,” she muttered, running her hand up and down her healed skin. “You- You actually healed me.”

Ignoring the lingering ache in his arms, Tommy forced himself to sit back up. “Yup, sure did. Now let’s get you out of here.”

Grabbing the woman’s hand, Tommy helped pull her to her feet. Then, he led her away from the courthouse, wrapping an arm around her shoulders just in case there was any flying debris (although it didn’t seem like things were that destructive). Once he made it to the intersection, he pointed down the road.

“I need to stick around here. You just get as far from here as you can,” Tommy instructed her.

The woman’s face was streaked with ash, and a few tears slipped through the grey when she saw she was safe. “Thank you. Thank you *so* much,” she told him, gripping his arm tight enough to leave indents in his skin. “We’re so lucky to have people like you.”

And with that, she let go of his arm and ran off, her low heels echoing off the buildings lining the streets. He watched her for a few more moments to make sure she was alright, and then he spun on his heel and ran back to the courthouse to find Wilbur.

The fight between Tubbo, Ranboo, Hellion, and Umbra was still going on, although it seemed to be waning. They were all moving slower now, and Tubbo had dropped his force fields in favor of shifting to hand to hand fighting with Umbra. She was faster than he was, but he was stronger, while Ranboo and Hellion still seemed stuck in their dance of smoke travel and void jumping. Surprisingly, none of them had noticed him. Hopefully it stayed that way.

Before Tommy could focus too much on the fight though, there was movement from the side entrance to the courthouse—one that hadn’t been damaged by the explosion at the front. The door was kicked open by a heavy boot, and Tommy stiffened when he saw Wilbur stumbling out with someone thrown over his back.

Running over, Tommy helped lower the person off of Wilbur’s back and onto the ground. The man was badly burnt, and seemed to be a janitor judging by his uniform.

“How did you find him?” Tommy asked, already ripping open the buttons of his shirt to get easier access to the burns.

“He was awake and calling for help. He passed out when I was carrying him out though,” Wilbur explained, and Tommy could hear how hoarse his voice was even through the voice changer. “Are- Are you sure you can heal this?”

Tommy gulped, staring at the extensive wounds. It was going to hurt like hell, that was for sure.

“He could die if I don’t,” Tommy said, looking up to meet the dark eyes of the owl mask.

Wilbur took a shaky breath. “Only if you want to.”

Only if he wanted to. Yeah, right. Like there was even a choice here. Of course Tommy wanted to heal this guy. He could handle temporary pain if it meant keeping these innocent bystanders from getting killed.

Plus, even though Tommy knew Wilbur didn’t like him healing people because of how it hurt him, Tommy *needed* to heal others. To use his powers for good. He now knew what it felt like to suck the life out of a person entirely, and he never wanted to feel that again. Instead, he wanted to bury the memory by healing the people who needed it. Giving his energy to others, instead of stealing it away and leaving someone a husk.

“Just catch me if I pass out,” Tommy told him. Then, before Wilbur could say anything to that, Tommy placed his hands on the man’s chest and let the energy flow through him.

Fuck. It was so much worse than the woman’s burn. Hers was only on her arm, but Tommy felt like his entire body was being engulfed in flame. He gasped as his skin was lit on fire, a sob tearing through his throat as the burns raced their way through his torso and up his neck. His head was spinning, but he refused to lift his hands away. The energy was so unbearably hot, and he could feel it draining out of him as he shifted the balance between himself and the injured man.

Seconds passed like hours. Tommy couldn’t breathe. Everything was pain.

And then, it was gone.

Tommy fell backwards into waiting arms. He curled into Wilbur’s side, gasping for air as the man gasped in unison, bolting upright and whipping his head around in a panic.

“Wh- What happened?!” He asked, his voice rough from smoke inhalation.

"You were injured by that explosion," Wilbur explained, wrapping his arms around Tommy and running a hand up and down his back. "I got you out, and he healed your burns."

The man's eyes widened as he took in Tommy's shivering frame. "I... I thought I was going to die. I was saying my prayers and everything—" his breathing hitched, and Tommy watched him frantically wipe his eyes. "I need to- I have to get home. To see my wife and—"

"You should get out of here," Wilbur told him, pointing to the intersection. "They're still fighting over there, so you don't want to be near here if you can avoid it."

The man startled when he noticed Tubbo, Ranboo, Hellion, and Umbra still fighting at the top of the steps. Then, he looked back at the two of them, and his face softened.

"Thank you. Both of you."

The pain had almost completely faded now, but Tommy still felt exhaustion wrapping around him like a suffocating blanket. "You're—"

His words were cut off by a loud tearing sound. Jolting against Wilbur, fear lanced through Tommy as Ranboo was practically thrown from a void portal, landing right in front of the three of them.

He groaned, clearly in pain. Immediately, Tommy whipped his head towards the janitor, who had already scrambled to his feet.

"Get out of here!" Tommy yelled at him, shoving Wilbur's arms off of him and forcing himself up onto shaky legs. "Go!"

The janitor didn't need to be told twice. He stumbled down the steps, while Tommy had to take a breath to keep himself from collapsing. Wilbur stood up beside him, and Tommy leaned into his side for support.

They both stared down at Ranboo, who had fluttered open his eyes behind his veil, and was meeting the eyes of their masks with clear confusion behind his own.

"Uh... hi?" Ranboo offered.

"Styx is still fighting Umbra and Hellion," Tommy told him, struggling to keep his voice level. "You might wanna go help him out."

Ranboo's brows furrowed, but he forced himself to sit up anyway. He winced when he tried to move though, and Tommy could see a nasty lump on the back of his head.

Goddammit.

"Wait, stop moving," Tommy then said, kneeling down beside him.

Ranboo stiffened, shying away from him. "Why?"

"Your head is hurt. You could have a concussion, idiot," Tommy snapped, already reaching for his head. When Ranboo flinched back again, he was forcibly reminded that Ranboo had no clue who he was with the mask on, so obviously he didn't trust him.

"I'm a healer," Tommy said in way of explanation.

Behind him, Wilbur shifted, and knelt down next to him. "You don't have to heal him, Tommy," he whispered in his ear, too low for Ranboo to make out. "You shouldn't heal him. He's not gonna die or anything."

Sighing, Tommy turned to whisper back, "I know but I just- I want to."

Wilbur didn't seem happy at the answer, but nodded for him to go ahead anyway.

He didn't need to heal Ranboo. Hell, Ranboo wasn't even severely injured. A concussion wasn't great, but he'd likely recover from it just fine on his own.

But even if Tommy had complicated feelings on the best friends he hadn't spoken to in months, he couldn't just stop caring. That was his permanent curse, it seemed. He cared too much about everything and everyone. He couldn't turn it off. Not even with the Syndicate.

"Aren't you those vigilantes that help civilians?" Ranboo asked, frowning behind the veil.

"Yup," they both answered in unison.

"Then why would you heal me?" Ranboo pushed.

Tommy shrugged. "I don't like to see people hurt."

There was a beat of silence as Ranboo considered that. He stared long and hard at Tommy's masked face, making him squirm uncomfortably underneath it. It was almost like Ranboo could see straight through the owl. For a moment, Tommy was terrified that he recognized him.

But then, he looked away. "I'm like, really dizzy right now. So I'd appreciate some help."

Alright. This wasn't going to be fun.

Tommy was already exhausted from healing the woman and the janitor, but still, he forced himself to scoot closer to Ranboo and put his hand on top of the lump on his head. Ranboo hissed between his teeth in pain, but didn't flinch away as Tommy began to heal him.

It wasn't as bad as the janitor. Not nearly as bad. His head throbbed with one of the worst headaches he'd ever had, but it was manageable.

Wilbur was the one to pull him away this time. Tommy didn't argue as he was tucked into his brother's side, squeezing his eyes shut to keep everything from spinning as he fought to keep the smoothie he'd had during his shift down.

Ranboo, meanwhile, had perked up. “Wow, that feels- wow, okay. That’s really good.” He struggled to get to his feet glancing at the fight Tubbo was still in with Umbra and Hellion, but spared a look back at the two of them. “Thank you guys. Seriously. That’s really kind of you.”

“We didn’t come here for you,” Tommy snapped, wincing when speaking made the throbbing worse. “We came here to help civilians.”

Ranboo flinched at that. “We, um, purposefully did this at night when we thought the courthouse would be closed. Were there still people inside?”

That was a surprise. That they actually made an effort to limit the number of civilian casualties.

Wilbur nodded. “Yeah. A few.”

“Ah. Got it.” Ranboo stood there for another moment, seemingly unsure of what to do. Then, he turned around, preparing to run back to the fight. “Uh, guess I’ll see you guys later.”

But before he could take even a single step forward, a dark blur flew over the three people fighting at the top of the stairs. Tommy gasped as Phil dropped Techno onto the top of the stairs, with Techno rolling and landing right in front of Tubbo with perfect precision. He straightened up in one smooth motion, lifting his swords and staring down Hellion and Umbra as Phil landed behind the two heroes.

“The fight is over,” Techno declared, his deep voice booming.

“We won’t hurt you, Hellion. But this has dragged on for too long,” Phil then said, folding his arms over his chest. “We’ve done what we needed to do. It’s time for all of us to go home.”

Umbra seemed confused, but Hellion understood the silent warning. He shot a glare at Phil, but sighed and reached a hand out towards Umbra. She frowned, but took the offered hand anyway, and the two disappeared in a plume of smoke that raced down the street and back towards the Hero Tower.

And just like that, Tommy and Wilbur found themselves surrounded by the Syndicate for the first time in six months.

Tubbo, ignoring Phil and Techno, immediately ran towards them.

“Lethe!” He called out. “Shit, man, are you okay?”

Ranboo opened his arms wide and Tubbo dove into them, squeezing Ranboo so tightly, it looked like his eyes were going to bulge out of their sockets. “I-” cough, “I’m good, Styx. I’m good.”

Okay. That was probably their cue to get out of there.

“Let’s go, Wil,” Tommy whispered, fighting the dizziness as he tried to get to his feet.

“Maybe we should wait-”

“Hey! Who the hell are you two?”

Tubbo’s sharp voice caught them both off guard, and Tommy froze from where he had been trying to detach himself from Wilbur’s side to stand up.

“Those are the Owls, Styx. The new vigilantes,” Ranboo explained in a hushed voice. “They healed my head.”

Behind his gold mask, Tubbo narrowed his eyes. “Oh. The idiots that are gonna get themselves killed.”

Tommy made a noise of protest at that. “Fuck you, man! We’re trying to help people that *you* put in danger!”

Tubbo huffed. “I’m just saying that you’re gonna get killed getting in the middle of shit you shouldn’t-”

“Styx,” Phil cut in, suddenly appearing behind Tubbo and Ranboo with Techno at his side. “That’s enough. We have no quarrel with the Owls, especially not if they helped Lethe.”

“I wasn’t trying to insult them! I’m just saying they’re gonna-”

“Styx,” Techno cut in with a low grumble, “you and Lethe should head back. Thanatos and I wanna talk to the Owls real quick.”

Wilbur’s arms around Tommy’s shoulders tightened their grip as Tommy flinched back at that. Shit. Fuck. What the hell could Phil and Techno want with them?

He didn’t want to talk to them. Not like this. Not with the mask on. His chest already ached something fierce just seeing Phil’s blue eyes shrouded by his veil, and hearing Techno’s familiar baritone. He hadn’t seen either of them in months, and all the want and pain and sorrow came flooding back over him all at once.

Tommy curled closer to Wilbur. Judging by the way Wilbur was wrapped around him like a koala on a branch, he had a feeling his brother was thinking the same way.

“What are you gonna talk to them about?” Tubbo asked, looking between Phil and Techno.

“Something private,” Techno said, shooting him a pointed stare. “Get going. We’ll debrief tomorrow.”

Recognizing the order as something to not be questioned, Tubbo and Ranboo both sighed and hurried back down the stairs of the courthouse. There were sirens in the distance, but no police were near the courthouse yet. They were probably waiting for the all clear once the villains left.

Once Tubbo and Ranboo had disappeared around a corner, Phil turned back to face the two of them.

There was a tense silence that hung over all of them like a waiting guillotine. Tommy could feel it. Could sense the sharp blade ready to crack his skull open any second now. All it would take was a single string to snap. One wrong word. One wrong move.

Without saying anything, Phil crouched down in front of them, his wings sagging against the marble. Techno then crouched as well, tossing his swords to the side and staring at them with an unreadable expression.

“It’s good to see you two again,” Phil said softly after nearly a minute of silence.

Wilbur flinched violently behind him, while Tommy sucked in a sharp breath between his teeth.

“Wh- What do you mean?” Tommy asked, his voice wavering. “We don’t know-”

“Tommy,” Phil said, cutting him off, “I saw you healing those civilians, and I saw Wilbur phase through the walls of the courthouse. Just because I wasn’t able to recognize my son with a mask on once doesn’t mean I’d make the same mistake twice.”

“We’ve had a feeling you two were the Owls for a while now,” Techno continued. “Ever since we heard about a pair of vigilantes that don’t get involved in fights and just try to help civilians, with one having healing powers? It wasn’t difficult to make the connection.”

Well, shit. And here Tommy and Wilbur thought they were being subtle.

Behind him, Tommy heard shifting as Wilbur tugged his mask off. Reaching up, Tommy did the same, figuring there wasn’t much point since it was just the four of them.

Lifting his veil, Phil gave them both the kind of smile that made something warm blossom in Tommy’s chest. “It’s so good to see your faces.”

“You look older, Tommy,” Techno commented, eyes skimming every inch of his face. “Wil, you look the same.”

Wilbur snorted. “Gee, thanks.”

For some reason, Phil’s smile saddened at those words. “Speaking of, I wanted to say happy late birthday. We tried calling, but the number said it was disconnected.”

Tommy gulped. “Um, yeah, we changed our numbers.”

He waited for the frown. For Phil to ask why, or Techno to mutter something bitter.

But that didn’t happen. Instead, Phil just nodded.

“I... I don’t hold it against you,” he reassured them. “The past few months, Tech and I have had a lot of time to think over things. How we handled everything that happened.”

“I don’t regret going after Dream that night,” Techno cut in. “But I regret not taking you two into consideration. That was pretty dumb. I should’ve known Dream would pull some dirty

trick like that.”

Phil nodded in agreement. “I regret letting you get pulled into something you didn’t want to be a part of.” His eyes shifted from Tommy’s to Wilbur’s. “Both of you. Not just Tommy.”

Wilbur’s breathing hitched. “I- But I said-”

“You didn’t want to, and you made it clear you were only doing it to protect me and Techno. But you were only *eighteen* when you became Orpheus. You were a child, and I should’ve made sure you knew that we could handle ourselves. That you didn’t need to be weighed down by the same sins that sit on my shoulders.”

Then, Phil looked back at Tommy.

“And Tommy… I’m so sorry about what happened with Dream. You were right. You should’ve never been put in that position in the first place.” He paused, eyebrows furrowing. “I don’t think I was in the wrong for what I did. I’m not going to pretend like I regret any of that, because I don’t. But I also recognize there are things I could’ve done better.”

“And I should’ve protected you both better,” Techno added, bowing his head. “I didn’t. I was too angry to realize the vulnerable spot I left open until it was too late.”

Something thick lodged itself in Tommy’s throat. Tears burned behind his eyes, and slowly, both he and Wilbur pulled apart from each other as they moved closer to Phil and Techno.

“You hurt me, and you hurt Tommy,” Wilbur said after a few moments, his voice thick with tears. “Those are things I don’t know if I can forgive you for.”

Phil blinked quickly, like he was fighting to keep his composure, but nodded anyway. “I understand that.” Then, both his and Techno’s gazes fell onto Tommy again, and he had to fight the urge to shrink back.

Did Tommy forgive them? They had apologized, but also neither one regretted what they’d done. Admittedly, it’s not like Tommy expected that from either of them. They were a family of stubborn bastards, all four of them, and Tommy knew that full well.

A part of him wanted to forgive them both. To let himself be wrapped up by Phil’s arms and lean his head onto Techno’s shoulder and fill the holes that were always aching in his chest.

But… things weren’t ever going to be the same between them. Tommy knew that, and Wilbur knew that. Too much had happened. Too many things had transpired. Tommy wasn’t Asphodel anymore, he wasn’t the Tommy they had taken in as their own.

And honestly, Tommy wasn’t sure if he even wanted things to go back to the way they once were.

He didn’t want to go back to living with Phil and Techno. He knew that. It would be too much. Too heavy of a presence to deal with when he and Wilbur were already weighed so far down by their own minds.

That didn't mean Tommy didn't want to just never talk to them again. It had already been hard enough the past few months with radio silence from them. Maybe... maybe they could carve out a new normal. Even if things weren't like they used to be, maybe they could figure out a balance that worked for all of them.

Maybe Tommy should've been frustrated that he still wanted Phil and Techno in his life despite all that had happened to him. But he couldn't find it in himself to deny that any longer. He wanted his family, even if it was a shattered picture of what it had once been.

"I don't know if I can forgive you either," Tommy said carefully, keeping his eyes on the marble. "But... I miss you guys."

"We both miss you," Wilbur added softly.

Both of them seemed surprised by that, and that only made Tommy's chest ache more. Did Phil and Techno really think he and Wilbur wouldn't miss them?

Tommy scooted forward until his knee was bumping against Phil's. Wilbur mirrored him, slumping over to rest his head on Phil's shoulder. Then, because Tommy and Wilbur had the same brain sometimes, both of them reached a hand out to Techno, who grunted as he took both their hands in his own.

It wasn't a hug. But it was something close to it.

"Tell me how you want to do this," Phil said, drawing his talons through Tommy's hair while pressing the top of his cheek against Wilbur's head.

"I... I don't speak for Wilbur, but I don't want to tell you where we live," Tommy began, playing absently with Techno's fingers. His knuckles were more callused than Tommy remembered them being. "We have our own lives now. I don't want to lose that."

"I feel the same," Wilbur agreed. "You're not gonna know where we live, or what our jobs are or anything. But..." he paused, biting his lip. "I'm willing to give you my new phone number."

Tommy couldn't help but snort at that. "I was gonna say that, dickhead."

Wilbur chuckled, and used his free hand to punch Tommy's arm. "Well, I said it first. Means more coming from me."

"Oh fuck you, no it doesn't," Tommy shot back, grinning at him. Suddenly, he thought of something else. "And, uh, I don't want you guys to tell the rest of the Syndicate about the whole, um, Owl thing."

"We figured," Techno huffed, squeezing Tommy's hand. "The others won't know who you are, but you'll be safe from the Syndicate obviously."

Tommy nodded. That... That was good. He could work with that.

He spared another glance at Wilbur, and saw he looked more relaxed now than Tommy had seen him be in a long time.

“May I make a suggestion?” Phil suddenly spoke up.

Both the brothers glanced up again, and Wilbur nodded at Phil to go on.

“Feel free to say no, but I was thinking that if you wanted, you could come over for dinner on Friday night,” Phil offered, his smile small. “You can stay for as long or as little as you want, and it’ll be just the four of us.”

Dinner.

Such a simple thing, yet it felt like a huge milestone at the same time. Tommy tried to imagine sitting at the dinner table with Phil and Techno again, like the past year hadn’t happened at all. Like they were a normal family again.

Except he had to remind himself they weren’t. They weren’t a normal family, but that was okay. Maybe the family picture created by the dinner would be broken. Maybe there would be a large crack in the picture frame. But maybe that wasn’t a problem.

They could work around the crack in the glass. They could repair it. It would never go away, and the glass would forever be altered, but it would still be a whole picture.

Sharing another look with Wilbur, Tommy raised his eyebrows in silent question. Wilbur gave him a particular look, one that Tommy knew Wilbur well enough to read as him letting Tommy make the call.

“Okay. That sounds nice.”

Phil beamed, while Techno reached up to ruffle Tommy’s hair.

“Then that’s what we’ll do.”

Chapter End Notes

and that was that :)

gonna be honest, when I started world forgetting I was under the assumption that I was probably gonna lose interest in mcyt before I finished it. and yet! I'm still here! I'm honestly so so glad I was able to finish this fic, it's a story I really wanted to tell, and I'm so glad so many of you were able to come along for the ride

I really hope you enjoyed the ending I came up with for this. It's not a perfect ending, but I still wanted it to be hopeful. Phil and Techno both have long ways to go, as do Wilbur and Tommy, but they're taking things one step at a time. This is honestly so

different from what my original ending vision was for this story, but the characters just took it somewhere else and I'm actually very happy with the destination.

also, before you ask, no there will not be a sequel to this fic! I've told the story I want to tell with this concept, and while it's not impossible that one day I might write a side one shot set in this universe, I highly doubt I will. I have a lot of other ideas I'm excited to move onto, and I hope you guys come with me to explore them <3

and speaking of other works, if you want MORE from me, **I have a new fic started!** this is going to be my main project now that world forgetting has ended. it's crimeboys centric but full sbi, and I'm so excited with the story I have in mind so please go check out [the stars and their children](#)

don't forget, I have a playlist for this fic and it's a certified banger set so check it out [here](#)

I have a discord server! if you want first notifs when I post something new or update one of my ongoing stories, or if you just want a place to talk about my works with other readers, come join us! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

thank you all so much for the love you've given this story, it's been such a fun ride and I love all you guys so much <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

Works inspired by this one

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[Damned if I do, Damned if I don't](#) by [Rhapsoddity](#)

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